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gamesTM

PS3 | Xbox 360 | Wii | PS2 | ... | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro



HIGHLIGHTS

BATTLEFIELD 2142 [PC] ARMY OF TWO [MULTI] CALL OF DUTY 3 [MULTI]
NEED FOR SPEED CARBON [MULTI] MGS: PORTABLE OPS [PSP] YAKUZA [PS2]
MERCENARIES 2 [PS3] SONIC WILD FIRE [Wii] SAINT'S ROW [360] BIOSHOCK [MULTI]


eMag

Can everyone please stop playing *Halo 2* on Xbox Live. For the love of God and all things pure, leave it alone. As good as it is, very few people appear to be playing anything else. There seems to be a discomforting shortage of gamers on Xbox Live playing Xbox 360 games. Could it be the weather? Maybe. Could it be the lack of triple-A games since that fine flurry in March? Probably. Or could it be a lack of 360 gamers? Certainly. Just the other day I sat down ready for an enjoyable online game of *PGR3*… or so I had hoped. Where has everyone gone? It's still a great game and the best racer on 360, so why so few people online? I've spent more time waiting in lobbies for anyone, let alone several people to enter than I have on the racetrack laying down rubber and getting shunted into barriers. But it's not just *PGR3*, I've witnessed a serious lack of gamers on many other games (with perhaps the exception of *Call Of Duty 2*) over the past few months. Are people becoming bored with 360 already? Personally I blame the lack of top-notch games being released that are required to sustain a healthy (or unhealthy) level of interest in gaming. Aside from the odd title of late, there just doesn't seem to be enough variety. So it's in these quiet times I look to the current line-up of 360 games to keep me entertained… and I'm left feeling slightly disappointed. *Halo 2* it is then.

Paul Morgan

Paul Morgan
Editor




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04



2UP
NEXT
07

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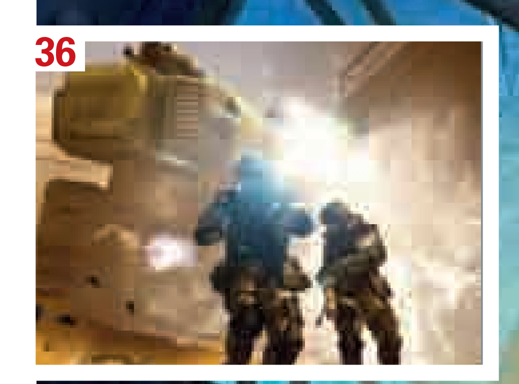
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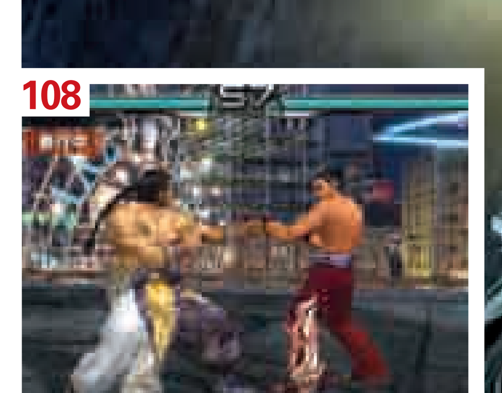
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

REIN OF TERROR

EPIC GAMES VP HITS OUT AT EPISODIC GAMING

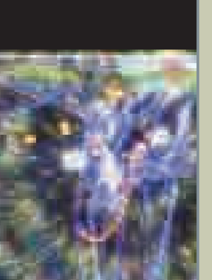
Despite being a lucrative market and boasting a number of influential developers, in the past the United Kingdom has struggled to establish an industry show. That could be about to change. Running from 11-13 July, the Develop Conference and Expo in Brighton has this year established itself as one of the premiere events of its type in Europe. Peter Molyneux, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, Chris Deering and Phil Harrison were among the 70 industry speakers who took part in the 47 sessions that comprised the occasion, joined by more than 40 companies from all corners of the industry.

Tandem Events, the conference organiser, conducted a survey of the speakers to gather opinion on the current state of the industry. More than half of all respondents admitted that strategic decisions taken this year would have fundamental implications for the future of their companies. It is an accurate reflection of the widespread unease induced by the inter-generational lull, where technological advancement and rising development costs are threatening the security of a number of developers.

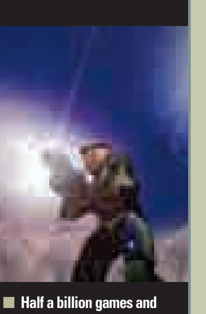
The real revelation, though, came during the keynote speech delivered by Mark Rein, vice president of Epic Games. Rein provoked consternation in the crowd as he vociferously rallied against growing industry talk of a move toward episodic game releases. Rein stated: "Developers come to us and say, 'I'm going to make a little bit of my game and then I'm going to sell it online, and then I'm going to have money to make a little bit more, and a little bit more…'I'm like, are you insane?!"

Rein continued: "You're paying $20 for a third of a game, you're waiting six months between episodes. I mean, that's a long time… I find that every time I put down a game for a period of time, I want to try a new game after that. I think franchise fatigue will set into these episodic games much sooner if they don't shorten time between episodes. The problem is that if you try to shorten the time between those episodes, you're going to get a lot of recycled content."

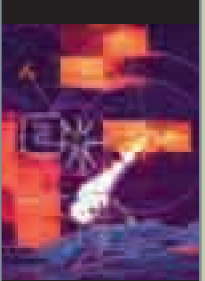
Rein went on to examine the problems of marketing a game with such a low price point, particularly when up against blockbuster titles like *Gears Of War*. Members of the audience questioned his view, one going so far as to compare Rein to "a dinosaur", though few could deny that his argument held water. "What I'd like to say is what works for *Half-Life* might not work for you," Rein concluded. "It gets on the cover of every magazine it wants to be on. If there were ten games competing for that space, *Half-Life* would always win. You won't even come close."



The online success of *Geometry Wars* contributed to one of Bizarre Creation's two awards.



Half a billion games and still going strong. *Halo* will always be king of Xbox Live.



Mizuguchi claims that *Rez* would look very different were it not for Kandinsky.

NOT ONLY BUT ALSO

MORE TALES FROM THE CONFERENCE FLOOR

WHO WON WHAT?

Held at Brighton's Hilton Metropole Hotel, for an audience of 450 industry professionals, the conference awards ceremony proved to be a good night for Bizarre Creations, receiving the Grand Prix for its work on *Project Gotham Racing 3* for Xbox 360. The Liverpudlian developer also received an award for Best Use Of Online for the smash hit Xbox Live title *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* and the online integration of *PGR3*. Sony was named Publishing Hero Of The Year, while Criterion was awarded Best In-House Development Team and received a second commendation for Art And Sound. Respect was also paid to Charles Cecil, a veteran of the industry who received the Development Legend award for his work on, among others, the *Broken Sword* franchise.

LIVE AND KICKING

Microsoft announced new figures illustrating the continuing success of the Xbox Live online service. The 'attach rate' for Xbox 360 stands at 60 per cent of all owners, beating the original console's rate of ten per cent by an astounding margin. The complementary 'Silver Service' no doubt helped the figure to reach such giddy heights, but the Marketplace and Live Arcade functions were also credited as major contributors. Microsoft's figures claimed that Live has hosted 2 billion hours of gaming, 900,000 voice and text messages daily, and around 500 million games of *Halo*. The figures are confirmation of the escalating profile of Microsoft in the next-gen wars, and with further expansion promised for the Live Arcade and Marketplace services, its target of 6 million Live accounts by 2007 looks more achievable by the day.

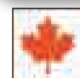
UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Speaking in a session called Creativity-Led Production: How To Bring New Ideas Into Line, legendary game designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi suggested that a star-studded musical team would be involved in the forthcoming *Lumines II*. Merely hinting at the, "pretty famous artists" involved, he is expected to reveal all in the coming weeks. Mizuguchi then went on to candidly discuss his influences, singling out the hit musical *Stomp!* as the primary inspiration for *Space Channel 5*, and the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky for cult action title *Rez*. Most intriguing of all was the revelation that for the recent battle simulation *Ninety-Nine Nights*, Mizuguchi's approach was inspired by news coverage of the Iraq war. He came to believe that it was impossible to rationalise the differing views into one coherent truth, which he then translated into *Ninety-Nine Nights'* dual-story structure.

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOADING... 20%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THE WINNER IS…

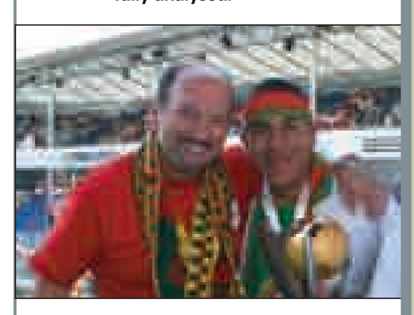
Star Trek's William Shatner is to host the first Canadian Awards for the Electronic and Animated Arts in Vancouver this September. The event will recognise Canadian achievement in both animation and videogame development. CAEAA producer Holly Carinci is overjoyed: "We wanted Mr Shatner from the beginning, and I cannot tell you how excited we are to learn that he has accepted". Organisers promise an event resembling a Hollywood award ceremony, with limousines, a red carpet and their magnificent host.

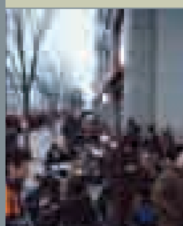




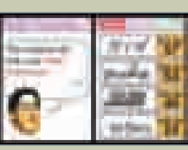
MOORE. FRIEND OR FOE?

Microsoft bigwig Peter Moore found himself in an awkward situation after being papped draped in a Portugal scarf and with an arm around a Portuguese gamer. And his excuse? The player in question was one of the two Portuguese gamers who were victorious in the Xbox World Cup. The fact that Moore was sporting a knock-off England shirt beneath the Portugal attire is unlikely to redeem him in the eyes of English gamers. The effect on Xbox 360 sales in England has as yet not been fully analysed.





DS Lite's Japanese launch saw queues stretching for hundreds of metres.



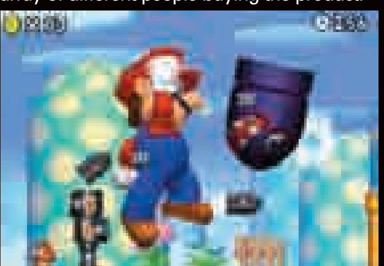
Titles such as *Brain Training* have broadened the appeal of DS beyond the usual demographics.

NO LITEWEIGHT

DS LITE LAUNCH IS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

The summer is a bad time for games. Everyone is eating ice cream and lying in the sun. A World Cup summer is even worse, with those not lying in the sun stacked on top of each other in sweaty pubs. Thank God that's over. Classically, the whole industry, from magazines to games, takes a downturn, but nobody seems to have told Nintendo. Evidently, no amount of diving, groin-stamping and unusual French head butts could have stopped the irresistible rise of DS with the new 'Liter' version proving more popular than even Iwata had hoped.

Ten days after launch, European sales stood at 200,000, nudging the total figure for DS in Europe past the 5 million mark. With quality titles being released month after month, and the continuing high performance of established classics like *Nintendogs* and *Animal Crossing*, it seems that Nintendo could be realising its dream of opening gaming up to new demographics. Says Nintendo Europe's marketing director Laurent Fischer, "Retailers across Europe have said that they've never seen such a vast array of different people buying the product:

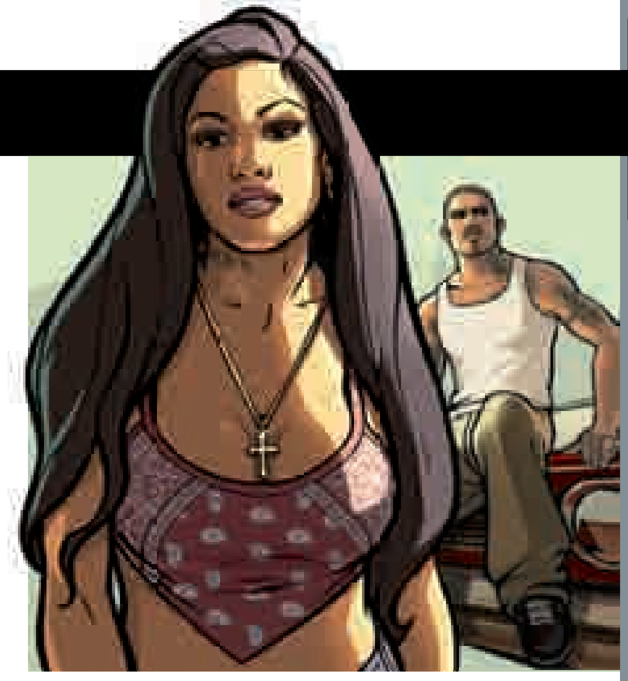


> "DS HAS BOOSTED JAPANESE SOFTWARE SALES BY 30 PER CENT"

everyone from businessmen to young women to grandfathers".

Similar success was enjoyed across the pond, where DS and DS Lite sold a combined total of 600,000 units in June, doubling the figure of the next nearest hardware platform and approximately one third of all system sales. Our American cousins are also warming nicely to the software, with *New Super Mario Bros* topping the charts for the second month running, the ten-month-old *Nintendogs* clocking up 100,000 sales and *Brain Age* and *Big Brain Academy* shifting a combined total of 350,000 units.

So there you have it, the social phenomenon that has long gripped Japan looks to be going global, with Nintendo's flourishing Wi-Fi service adding yet more fuel to the fire. A recent survey claimed that DS has boosted Japanese software sales by 30 per cent, with the top ten dominated by exclusives for the handheld on a weekly basis. Good news, too, for Wii as the success of DS has silenced its numerous doubters, and bodes well for the most innovative and mysterious of the next-generation consoles. If the connectivity between the two machines works as well as we hope, each is likely to feed off the success of the other, giving Messrs Gates and Kuturagi very good reason to be worried.



HOT COFFEE COOLS

SMACKED WRIST FOR TAKETWO

Finally, after a year where *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was pulled from the shelves of many stores, and umpteen lawsuits had been served, the Federal Trade Commission has officially ended its investigation into TakeTwo's liability for the Hot Coffee mod. The body's conclusions should satisfy the majority of the gaming community.

The FTC has ruled that TakeTwo will not be fined or face any penalties, but rather should reveal all content (including disabled content) to the ratings board or face up to a $11,000 fine for any future violations. TakeTwo CEO Paul Eibeler said the company is "extremely pleased" with the closing of the investigation and looks forward to, "putting this behind us and focusing on what we do best – creating videogames."

The discovery of the explicit mini-game hidden in *San Andreas* in June last year, and the ensuing controversy over Carl and his laydeez caught in coitus saw Hilary Clinton and publisher TakeTwo embroiled in heated debate regarding *San Andreas'* content rating.

So it's no more than a smack on the wrist then – and rightly so. It's been a long year for both Rockstar Games and TakeTwo. Let's hope the mud doesn't stick.



You see, Mrs Clinton? It's dry-humping. Rockstar is actually promoting safe sex.

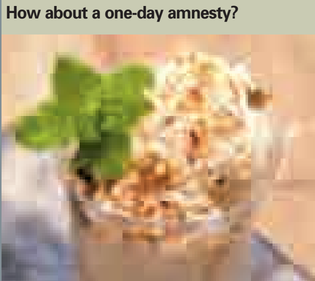
games™ THE TOP FIVE

WORST THINGS ABOUT THE SUMMER



No.5 HOSEPIPE BANS

How about a one-day amnesty?



No.4 TOO MUCH ICE CREAM

Curse our weak wills and expanding waists



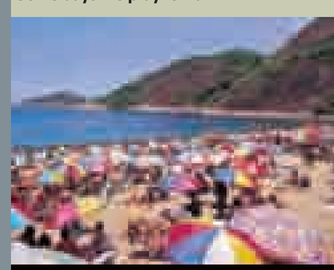
No.3 CRAP GAME RELEASES

Apparently everyone's outside



No.2 HEAT

Some days we pray for rain



No.1 TOURISTS

Love the beach. Can't get near it

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 47: CELEBRITY VOICE CASTS



Yakuza's voice cast features Rachel Leigh Cook and Eliza Dushku. No, us neither.

With so many games featuring cut-scenes, we accept that a good voiceover is vital to the quality of the overall product. Celebrity voiceovers, on the other hand, aren't always synonymous with 'good', and very often can lead a game down a dark and dangerous path.

A term like 'celebrity voice cast' has more or less become double-speak for 'this game will have far more cut-scenes than it needs', the producers understandably wanting some effort for the high prices paid. Really famous people can also have a distracting effect on the player, jolting them from the world of the game every time a word is uttered – Samuel L Jackson's police captain in *San Andreas* being a prime example.

Fortunately enough, these 'celebrity' casts normally consist of a random selection of has-beens and never-will-bes, their limited acting talent doing nothing for the overall drama, and barely justifying the fat payday they no doubt received. Oh, and it gives everyone yet another reason to harp on about games and movies merging, and trust us we don't need any more of those. If it were up to us, we'd stick to the nobodies. After all, how much good can the presence of Michael Madsen possibly do?



Reservoir Dog Michael Madsen takes up the mic to voice *Yakuza's* Shimano.

DATA STREAM

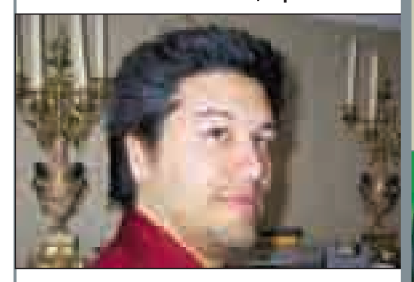
DOWNLOADING... 60%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ROMERO'S MMOG

John Romero who led the development of titles such as *Doom* and *Quake*, has unveiled his latest venture: MMOG dev studio Slipgate Ironworks. Currently looking for staff, his studio has begun work on its first project. All he has stated is that it will be an MMOG and that it'll be ready 'when it's done'. Romero was keen to encourage prospect employees: "Are you interested in joining our amazingly talented superstar game development team? Are you supercore enough to survive our hyper-dimensional environment?!" Er, supercore?

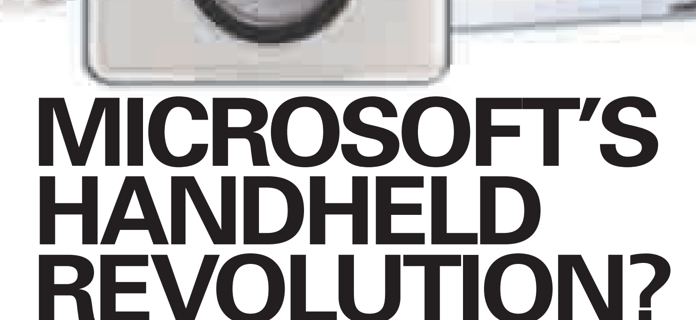




SONY, RACIST?

Sony has come under fire for an advert which many claim carries racist undertones. Part of a campaign to promote the white PSP, the ad shows a white woman menacingly gripping a black woman's jaw. The advertisement sparked protest from net goers, who claim it is a display of apparent white dominance and superiority. Although Sony responded to the allegations, stating that, "The advert focuses on the contrast between the black and white PSP… it had no other message or purpose", the pressure eventually became too much and Sony pulled the adverts.





MICROSOFT'S HANDHELD REVOLUTION?

SERIES OF NEW XBOX-BRANDED DEVICES MAY BE POISED

Rumours of a Microsoft handheld gaming device have been circulating for months. You may remember we went so far as to cover a box with paper, write 'Xboy' across the top and stick bottle caps on it to prove a point.

J Allard's Xbox division has indeed been working on a handheld, but Seattle Times columnist Brier Dudley thinks it is in fact a huge range of software and one central piece of hardware aimed at taking on Sony's PSP, Nintendo's DS, and Apple's iPod, – all established methods of digital communication and distribution. Now, Microsoft has ended speculation by announcing that DS and PSP are safe – for now.

Zune will be the umbrella brand for a series of hardware and software products involved in digital entertainment distribution. The first instalment will be a portable music player along the lines of iPod, with a portable video player and, it's assumed, a portable gaming device to follow. Chris Stephenson, GM of marketing at Microsoft, was reluctant to comment on anything but the music player, and revealed that the device would contain a hard drive and Wi-Fi capabilities.

Stephenson claimed that Microsoft was currently investigating eight different Wi-Fi implementations including the ability to view and sample music from other Zune players in the same hotspot. Wireless capability is essential to the company's overall plan for Zune, and the cornerstone of what Microsoft can offer that Apple does not. "The ability to connect the different devices is a key part of the strategy," Stephenson claimed. "Whether it's a portable media device, or a phone, or the Xbox or a Media Centre PC, the idea is that you can access your entertainment from anywhere."

The response from the music business has been immediate and positive. George White of Warner Music Group stated, "We're incredibly excited by it. It's something that we hoped peer-to-peer services would bring to the digital retail space". This new level of file sharing will undoubtedly throw up questions regarding licensing, with a restriction on users per hotspot being proposed, but for now Zune is seen as a welcome challenge to Apple's 75 per cent share of the digital music player market.

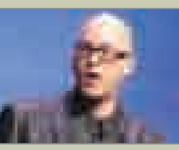
White comments, "We definitely see the need for really strong competition in the market place. We'd love to see more players getting in and offering more types of digital content. We think having stronger competition is likely to yield that outcome".

Whether it will, is another matter. Apple may be in an unassailable position, but even moderate success for the music branch of Zune would greatly increase the chances of a Microsoft handheld gaming platform to challenge Sony and Microsoft in the future.

"THE IDEA IS THAT YOU CAN ACCESS YOUR ENTERTAINMENT FROM ANYWHERE"

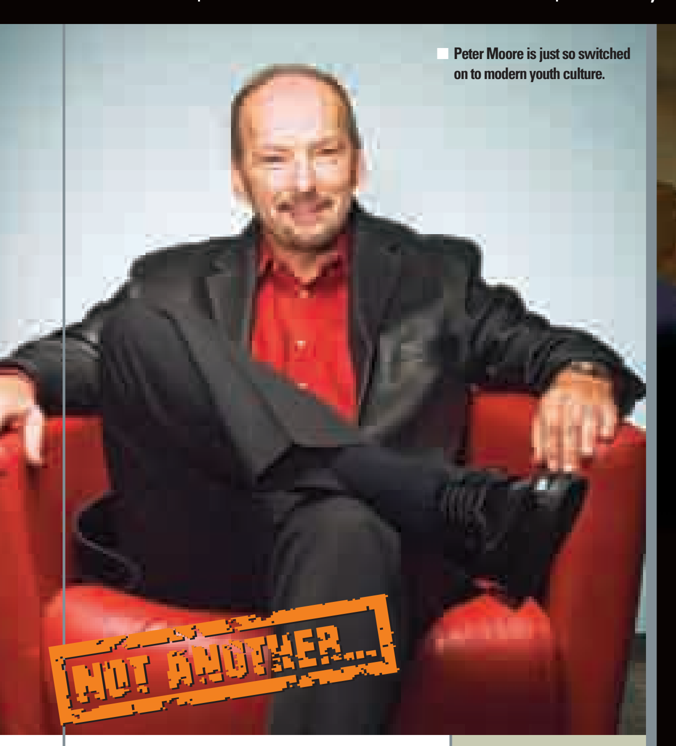


You've probably seen it before, but we love it. This is J Allard before the Xbox – overweight, balding and, notably, earring-less…



… and this is him now – waxed, polished, dressed up, a passion for Xtreme Sportz – achingly lifestyle. And working on Argo.


eMag



Peter Moore is just so switched on to modern youth culture.

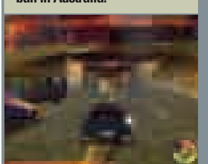
IDEA THEFT ARGUMENT

MICROSOFT'S NEW CONTROLLER IDEA SOUNDS DISTINCTLY FAMILIAR

Peter Moore, as is regularly documented, loves the Wii. He's even suggested that people will buy one with their Xbox 360s because both together would still cost less than a PS3. This month, though, he's been expressing some familiar ideas in an interview with GamerTag Radio, in which he hints that a new Microsoft controller might be in production.

In an amazing flash of insight, Moore stated that some non-gamer consumers might be intimidated by the complexity of standard game controllers – er, pretty much exactly what Nintendo said years ago, then. "Shoulder buttons, triggers, analogue sticks, D-pads – I mean, there's a lot going on there," he muses astutely. He goes on to hint that Microsoft is working on a solution to that problem, "We've got to bring more people in… Any way that we can play and make games easier and more intuitive takes the intimidation factor away". Bravo, Peter Moore. Truly, your original thinking astounds us all. Just please don't go with the motion-sensing idea. That's been done already, before any of the respective controllers have even been released.

The *Reservoir Dogs* game, meanwhile, is also facing a ban in Australia.



Beware that little red light. It's costing you.



DEAD IN THE WATER

DEAD RISING EFFECTIVELY BANNED IN GERMANY

The German ratings board has refused to give Capcom's flagship zombie-bashing 360 title an age rating, effectively rendering it unsaleable in the territory when it is launched later this year. If Capcom is unable to sell the game in such a significant European territory, it could harm the game's sales prospects in Europe overall.

It must be stressed that the board's refusal to rate the title does not constitute an actual ban – only governmental authorities have the clout to ban titles outright upon release, making them saleable only on an 'under-the-counter' basis and banning advertising or publicity for the product. However, because the game is unrated, it is left entirely open to a banning upon its release. More significantly though, putting an unrated game into an Xbox 360 would seriously mess with the parental controls, meaning Microsoft will not let publishers put unrated games on shelves. So, *Dead Rising* can't be published in Germany, regardless of whether it ends up banned or not.

Germany has always been wary of videogame violence, often either banning games from being displayed in shops upon their release or demanding certain content or insignia be changed for the territory. As videogames approach photo realism, it is a likely and worrying prospect that many more titles will be deemed too violent for public sale in the coming years.

UNEXPECTED COSTS

FIGURES STATE CONSOLES RESPONSIBLE FOR £70 MILLION IN ENERGY WASTAGE?

Many of us were grumbling about the price of Xbox 360 when it was released, but that was before the US blog DX Gaming posted an objective report into how much consoles cost to run. The figures revealed that even when in Standby mode, consoles' energy leakage (PlayStation2 and Xbox 360 in particular) is a huge concern. In the case of PlayStation2, the only way to prevent the unit from leaking an enormous two watts of energy while in Standby is to turn the switch off at the back, and in Xbox 360's case, removing the plug from the wall. All together, an Xbox 360 costs around $20 a year to run, and nearly $3 can be attributed to energy wastage.

Two watts might not seem like that much, but over the course of a year, PlayStation2s and other consoles across the country are responsible for £70 million's worth of wasted energy, according to a governmental energy review. Standby modes on televisions, chargers and other consumer electronics devices are also coming under criticism, and in anticipation of the energy shortage that Britain might well be facing in the next 50 years or so, it's expected that the government might well take action to phase out these costly and wasteful Standby modes all together.



With energy conservation becoming an increasing concern across the world, all consumer electronics firms will have to start working toward reducing the energy consumption of their devices. PlayStation3's energy costs, though, are likely to be absolutely astronomical.


eMag

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



VEXX SEQUEL?

Canadian publisher Throwback has successfully acquired the rights to a number of titles left over from Acclaim's liquidation in 2004. Obtained titles include *Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance, Vexx, Legends Of Wrestling, Extreme-G Racing, Re-Volt* and *Summer Heat Volleyball*. Of these titles, *Vexx* is worthy of note, but for all the wrong reasons. Broken in every way imaginable – games™ awarded *Vexx* a disgraceful 2/10 – the thought of a publisher spending time and money to purchase the rights to it is frightening. We can only hope a sequel fails to materialise.



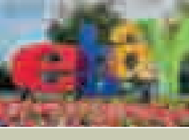




THE GIFT OF LITE

Nintendo's campaign of bringing videogames – in the shape of the DS and games such as *Brain Age* and *Nintendogs* – to the masses has proved so popular that it's set its sights on a new target: the President of the United States. 6 July was George Bush's sixtieth birthday, and, to mark the occasion, Nintendo sent him a congratulatory copy of *Brain Age* and a DS Lite on which to play the game. Surely it's just a matter of time before all major world leaders are spotted driving down their brain ages.





The growing popularity of eBay has made the process a lot easier for touts.

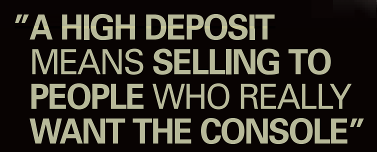
GOING, GOING, GONE

SONY PROPOSES £150 PLAYSTATION3 DEPOSIT

Wherever you find a highly sought after item, you'll find someone willing to pay a high price. It is a fundamental rule of business, and one that touts regularly exploit. The music industry has long bemoaned the practice of bulk-buying concert tickets and selling them for inflated sums, and since the emergence of eBay the problem has only worsened.

Popular events such as Glastonbury have taken measures against the practice, going so far as to request photo identification with every ticket purchase, and since the widespread touting after the launch of Xbox 360 – where consoles were changing hands online for as much as £2,000 – Sony has decided to take precautions with PlayStation3.

Those wishing to pre-order a console might now have to pay a deposit of £150 to secure one – a huge jump from previous deposits which were often as low as £5. Every pre-order form will also be filed centrally to ensure that only one console can be purchased per household. Discussions between Sony and various high-street retailers are still in the early stages, and while the finer details are likely to change, it seems clear that security will be much tighter for PlayStation3 than any previous console.

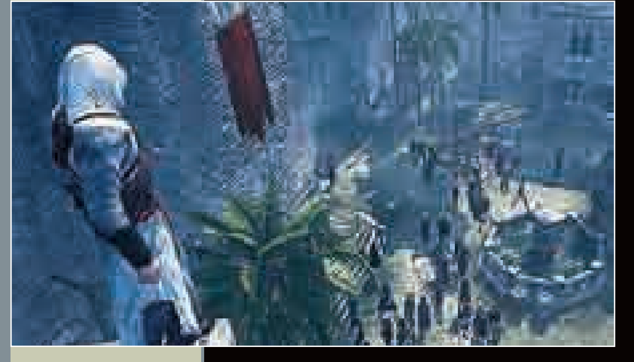


"A HIGH DEPOSIT MEANS SELLING TO PEOPLE WHO REALLY WANT THE CONSOLE"

In an interview with MCV, a buyer, speaking off the record due to a Non-Disclosure Agreement, stated: "There are two options, we can base pre-orders on low deposits and not guarantee that we'll have the stock to fulfil those orders. Or we can take high deposits and guarantee – as far as our stock allocation allows us – that we can give [the customer] what they want. Taking a substantial deposit means that we are selling the console to people who really want it."

The move is likely to provoke consternation among consumers, but as all deposits will be refundable it really is in the best interests of the market. After all, the practice of buying multiple consoles only to re-sell them at vastly inflated prices is morally compromised and tantamount to fraud. With Xbox 360, many had to wait months for a machine they had been guaranteed well before the release date, and while Sony assures us that PlayStation3 will suffer no such supply problems, the only people a large deposit will seriously affect are those planning to bulk buy and sell on. In this instance, a £150 deposit seems to be a necessary evil.

Games like *Assassin's Creed* promise to make full use of PlayStation3's considerable power.

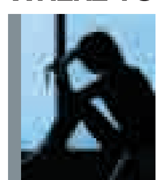



eMag



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS



I'm bored of it now. The voices that are heard above all the others at the moment are those from the publishers and developers saying how much they think of Nintendo's new console.

What's that you say? You think Wii is a breath of fresh air? It's nice to see a company trying something new and giving developers a whole new range of opportunities? That's sweet. It's nice of you to say so. It's just that you're displaying roughly the same level of hypocrisy as Adolph Hitler would if he'd deemed another 'quite naughty'. All the niceties in the world don't change the fact that nobody outside of Nintendo seems to want to touch the thing.

The likes of Ubisoft, THQ and Activision have made small efforts to show support with titles such as *Red Steel*, *Downhill Jam* and various animated movie tie-ins, but the level of praise that is being heard from most tiers of the industry would suggest a little more than this scant offering. Everyone complains about a lack of originality, but when it arrives the masses are too scared to shift from the norm. We are in fact our own worst enemies because this trend extends into the realm of videogames that the public – that's us – are buying. We're more than happy to complain when the nth *Halo* wannabe turns up, but then who purchased *killer7*? Why was it doomed to linger just outside the charts for one week then vanish? When good titles do arrive, we simply don't buy them, and if we don't buy them then there's no reason at all for publishers to take the chance on them. In turn, this means that developers think twice before embarking on original projects in the first place – et voila – we find ourselves chowing down on *Advent Rising*. We're all hypocrites – me, them, and especially you. Maybe I'm just having a bad day…

Mr X is closer to perfection than you'll ever manage.

FROM THE FRONT

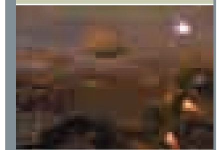
SONY BORROWS MILLIONS AFTER RISING COSTS. DELOURA ABANDONS SONY FOR UBISOFT. SUMMER SLUMP OVER?



IS SONY REALLY IN SERIOUS FINANCIAL TROUBLE?

SONY STATE

A few months ago in From The front, we reported that Sony Corp's overall operating costs had risen dramatically, leading the company to post a considerable loss over all its departments. Through it all though, the videogame division has remained profitable thanks to the continual popularity of PlayStation2, which is still selling perplexingly large numbers of consoles despite the technology's age and still relatively high price. Things appear to be getting worse, though. This month sees the company



Developing things like this doesn't come cheap.



ON THE MOVE

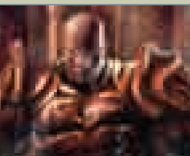
SCEA'S DELOURA MOVES TO UBISOFT

Another blow to Sony this month came with the departure of SCEA's developer relations manager, Mark DeLoura. After a five-year stint with Sony, DeLoura has chosen to move to Ubisoft's San Francisco office in a new role as technical director.

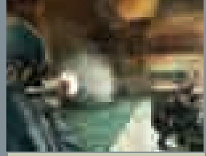
Very much an industry veteran, DeLoura had previously edited *Developer* magazine and worked as technical director for Nintendo of America before moving to Sony. Understandably, his move was not the easiest of decisions and he admitted to, "mixed feelings" about his departure.

"So many things done, but so many things yet to do… I'll take my victories at Sony, the largest of which is our greatly expanded GDC presence. It will take a few weeks or months to get Sony out of my bones," DeLoura confessed on his blog.

The move could be seen as a damaging blow to Sony mere months before PS3's arrival, further compounding the machine's turbulent pre-launch ride.



The DeLoura touch will now be absent from titles such as *God Of War 2*



Expect to see the man's name pop up during *Rainbow Six Vegas'* credits.

taking out an ¥80 billion loan that could potentially worsen its already fragile financial situation while the Japanese tax authorities have demanded ¥28 billion in unpaid taxes from the electronics giant.

The loan, according to Sony's spokesman Shinichi Tobe, is for 'general purposes', although given that the company will probably be recovering from the R&D and manufacturing costs of the PlayStation3 for years to come, it is likely that the new console is partly to blame for this temporary shortfall in funds. This, it must be stressed, is the first time that Sony has taken out a loan for ten years – since the release of the original PlayStation, coincidentally.

As for the tax shortfall, well, Sony isn't happy about that at all. The Tokyo tax bureau claims that about ¥74 billion of the company's videogame income was unreported; much of the business was conducted overseas with Sony Computer Entertainment America, but under Japanese tax laws, Sony should allegedly have reported such overseas dealings. Sony itself is adamant that it had abided by the tax laws of all the countries in which it dealt and is confident of avoiding the extra taxation.

¥28 billion is an awful lot of money, and one cannot help but feel that Sony might be in even more financial difficulty than it's letting on. And with PlayStation3 generally failing to impress before its release, it looks like we might just see the end of the PlayStation era sooner than we expected. Or are we being over-dramatic?

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

RETAIL SLUMP BEGINS TO STRAIGHTEN UP

Finally, after months of concern and retail chains whining about next-generation angst, price cuts, not selling enough pre-owned games and consumers switching off to the games market, everything is, predictably, returning to normal. Game has reported sales increases of 21.2 per cent for the first half of 2006, which was in line with its expectation for the year and will hopefully mark the end of months and months of naysayers' insistences that the games market is headed for a massive crash (and also that Doomsday will come this September, purging the world of the sinful and foul smelling).

Given that the slump was mostly the fault of Xbox 360 in the first place though – with consumers slowing down on PlayStation2 and Xbox purchases also causing a minor slump while everyone took time off to let their wallets recover from the £279.99 purchase – the rest of the year might not prove so successful. Although 'next-generation angst' among consumers will likely be less pronounced, with a £500 console on the shelves people might be putting off their purchases all together.



DS Lite purchasers out purchasing. Who says there was a drought?

With the World Cup over, people may start buying games again. If only there were actually games to buy in summer…

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	Multi
2	Prey	2 Games	Multi
3	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	DS
4	Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	Buena Vista	PSP
5	Over The Hedge	Activision	Multi
6	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Multi
8	FIFA World Cup 2006	Electronic Arts	Multi
9	Battle For Middle-Earth II	Electronic Arts	Multi
10	The Legend Of Jack Sparrow	Ubisoft	Multi



Brain Training



Pro Evolution Soccer 5

FIFA World Cup 2006



REPEAT PERFORMANCE

THE SECOND-HAND SALES MARKET IS LOVED BY RETAILERS BUT HATED BY PUBLISHERS, GAMES™ FELT IT WAS TIME TO INVESTIGATE WHY…

For many gamers, the cost-effective way of ensuring that they can keep up with the latest games is to buy 'already-owned' titles, but the pre-owned market on the high street – which is a around ten years old and continuing to grow – is increasingly under attack from the people who bring us those games. Listen carefully, though, and you'll hear nothing but silence. Although software houses make no money on these second-hand sales, many are reluctant to go on record for fear of upsetting the major retailers. Privately, they're praying that the 'used' market can somehow be slain, yet they have a huge job on their hands. The pre-owned market is worth millions of pounds each year and many gamers rely on Game, GameStation, Internet retailers and eBay among others for their cheap, second-hand goodies. They argue that it's a great way of getting hold of old titles and that without it they would be unable to fund their hobby. To axe this market would be controversial to say the least. We look at the state of the pre-owned market and the threat it poses to developers. With supermarkets slashing the price of games, online retailers discounting heavily, and the ever-present threat of piracy, these are worrying times indeed for software houses.

"He isn't giving up… Can you please give him a statement?" The public relations girl working for this innovative, world-famous and controversial game developer is getting anxious. She has been asked a series of questions about the firm's view of pre-owned games, and even though she has already rebuffed **games™** with a quick line saying she wouldn't be able to respond to our questions in time for deadline, we've gone back asking for the company's general line. Just a line or two, no more. We can detect the sighs and frustration at our persistence. And sure enough, the colleague to whom she has dispatched her message responds: "While we feel comfortable answering specific questions on our own products, we generally don't like to comment on more general industry issues."

Except this isn't an everyday, general industry issue. It may look like that at face value, but you couldn't get a more controversial topic if you proposed to site nuclear weapons at the end of every street. For this is a ticking time bomb of an issue, one which very few software houses wish to comment on.

The evasive company to which we have referred is not alone. Each of the major software firms, their public relations people and even the retailers gave a barrage of excuses for why they couldn't answer a question on this burning topic. They ranged from, "Personally I don't want to comment," to "It's far too contentious an issue and we would honestly prefer to stay out of this one for the moment," to the warning: "This is a sensitive issue for publishers. It's best not to antagonise them".

At the topic's heart is money. The pre-owned games market has been around on the high street for about a decade. It is believed to be worth around £50 million to retailer Game alone and up to £100 million across the industry according to trade mag MCV. Each year, hundreds of thousands of pre-owned games change hands over high street counters or are bought from online retailers specialising in second-hand titles. Auction website eBay accounts for many more game transactions – and yet software houses do not see a penny from these 'second' sales of their titles.

There is no love whatsoever for pre-owned games within the industry, but, desperate not to anger retailers, publishers largely keep quiet. Keith Ramsdale, managing director of Electronic Arts, is an exception. He has accused some retailers of devaluing brand new games but extending the

"HAVING **INVESTED MORE** AND MORE IN THE **DEVELOPMENT OF GAMES**, I THINK THAT PUBLISHERS BELIEVE **RETAILERS SHOULD SHARE** SOME OF THIS **EXTRA REVENUE** WITH THEM"

GARRY WILLIAMS, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, MASTERTRONIC GAMES

As much as software companies don't agree with retailers making money from second-hand sales, they don't want to upset the people who put their games on the shelves in the first place.

reach of their pre-owned offers. "Brand new product is being made to look worthless and some retail outlets are starting to look more like libraries," he says, referring to the large range of older games sitting on the shelves, taking up space that could be used for the sale of brand new titles.

It is possible to walk into a high street game store and find every version of *Pro Evolution Soccer,* for instance, costing as little as £2.50 for the first few incarnations of this popular series. Back in the day, this wasn't possible. Chain stores selling games from John Menzies to Boots concentrated on brand new titles, and independent stores tended not to bother with second-hand games.



You'll no doubt see older versions of sports titles doing the rounds a second time out as newer editions spew forth.

IF YOU WANTED pre-owned, you either looked through the newspaper or magazine small ads or you snapped one up from a mate in the playground. It was nothing like today when you can walk into Game or GameStation and see pre-owned sections, pre-owned stickers on game cases and pre-owned posters. You can buy two games for a fiver or exchange a couple of your own old games for a discount on a new one.

There is certainly no hiding the fact that you can play your game and trade it in later for a new one. And it's kerching, kerching, kerching for the retailers, since buying up games cheap from the punters and then selling them on for a profit means they are able to achieve a greater mark up than if they sold a brand new game sourced from a publisher. And they pay less VAT.

To test this, we took a brand new, sealed copy of Nintendo DS game *Spyro: Shadow Legacy* – which cost £30 new – into a northern branch of Game. We were offered just £15, with other pre-owned games of this particular title selling for around £25 – representing a £10 profit for Game. But then, for



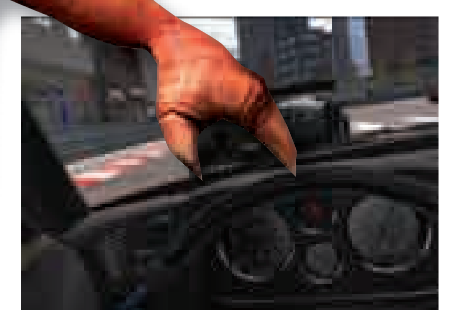
The last thing we want to do at the dawn of the next generation is put innovation at risk.

people with games to sell it works well. Surely it's prudent for a gamer to sell them to a high street store to enable them to buy – and play – the latest games? If nothing else, it means gamers don't have to leave completed, dud or bored-with games to gather dust on the shelves in their homes.

"I think there has always been a second-hand market for games, if only in the school playground in the early days," says Jon Ritman, creator of the popular *Match Day* games for the 8-bits in the Eighties. "I think its like buying anything second hand – it's part of life. After all, games are expensive for kids. When you know how much work goes into a big game you can see why, but that doesn't mean most kids can afford many games, so they buy second-hand or cheap re-releases."

Such a view from within the industry is rare. The majority hate the pre-owned market. And should gamers care? Well, yes actually, they should. Although the game industry is worth £1.3 billion, the plethora of used games and their popularity among consumers – after all, if they didn't sell well, they wouldn't dominate so many shelves – is causing a serious dent in the profits of publishers. The upshot of this is that the publishers have less cash to spend on creating innovative ideas, leading to fewer risks being taken. Gamers are already moaning that there are too many *Ridge Racer*s and not enough *LocoRoco*s, and if the funds for research and development are starved there's less chance of new and genre-diversifying titles. With the game industry being so creatively diverse – and needing such diversity to survive – the reduction in funds could put innovation at risk.

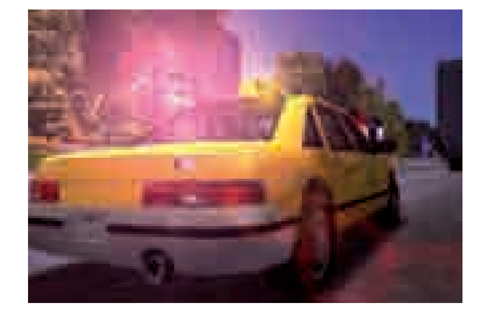
Yet far from seeing a decline of the pre-owned market, it appears to be on the rise. Even in America, second-hand games are proving popular. US game giant GameStop is predicting higher than previously estimated revenues for 2006 – having revelled in fourth quarter results of £1.67 billion – with Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter saying part of the reason was better margins on used games. More frightening for publishers is that pre-owned games are appearing far faster than they used to – for example, it only took a month or so for the first pre-owned PSP games to surface. *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* wound up back on the shelves as a pre-owned title within days at around a fiver less.



And so with this in mind, it is inevitable that certain companies may well think about taking steps to destroy the pre-owned market. Publishers are discussing among themselves any possible action against the resale of games, and have enlisted the help of trade body the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) in their fight.

There have been rumours that Sony was about to pull off an audacious move aimed at curtailing the use of used games on PS3. It was said to be creating a system whereby gamers would only own the licence to a game and could use it on just one machine – their own. If they sold it, it would not work on the buyer's machine. If they rented a title, it would not work either.

Sony is well known for its hatred of the second-hand market. SCEE's UK commercial director Kevin Jowett is worried that pre-owned titles for £10-£15 are setting a price-point in the heads of consumers, making full price titles seem too expensive. But as the industry held its breath, hoping that the stories would be true, Jennie Kong, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's public relations manager for the UK, quashed them. "I would like to clarify





We never want to see a second-hand copy of *LocoRoco* sitting on the shelf. It's far too good to flog back.



We got more for *FIFA World Cup* on eBay than the shops offered us. Depends whether you can be arsed with the P&P, we guess.

that this is false speculation and that PlayStation3 software will not be copy protected to a single machine but will be playable on any PlayStation3 console," she confirmed. But when pushed on what Sony thought about the pre-owned market, she told **games™**, "We normally pass such questions on to ELSPA who can discuss the wider implications of the second-hand market." Another brick wall had been built.

So on to ELSPA we went. Its report, The UK Interactive Entertainment Industry 2005, made great reference to the pre-owned market. David Yarnton, general manager of Nintendo UK, wrote, "Maintaining profit levels here in the UK is harder than it's ever been, and a key challenge for the UK industry going forward into 2006 is the topic of pre-owned software". In the section on retailers, the report said pre-owned game sales had grown over the past few years to a staggering ten per cent of the entire market.

The report realised the pros: "Pre-owned titles offer economic benefits to consumers – especially children – and also extend the catalogue of software in store," while making it known that publishers were frustrated at not being able to share in the profits. It said publishers are, "Fearful that the pre-owned market is destabilising market prices", and concluded, "there is a realistic argument that high numbers of consumers swap out their old games for new premium product thereby assisting new sales, but without a doubt the pre-owned market as a share of total sales is substituting full price new product." But despite its comments on the pre-owned market, it told **games™**, "This topic is outside of ELSPA's remit."

GARRY WILLIAMS, THE business development director of Mastertronic Games, was more forthcoming. As the founder of Sold Out Software, with £4.99 titles such as *Black & White*, *Carmageddon 2* and *Mortal Kombat 4* under its belt, Williams understands the re-release market extremely well. And while he doesn't welcome the second-hand market, he believes that the industry simply has to accept it. "The second-hand games market is like the poor, it has been with us for some while and is unlikely to leave us," he suggested. "At best I believe it is viewed as a necessary evil. It is not so much that it dents profits; it's that it ties up shelf space and consumers' time. Having invested more and more in the development of games, I think publishers believe retailers should share some of this extra revenue with them."

Williams did, however, welcome Sony's scotching of the 'one-game, one-machine' rumours: "Sony has enough to do in ensuring a successful launch of PS3. They are canny enough to stay away from the rats' nest of European litigation that would ensue – even if it was technically possible, which is also unlikely."

Many punters say that the reason they buy pre-owned titles is because of the cost of full-price games. For years, £35 has been a benchmark, but Xbox 360 began to push that up to £50. It reflects the rising development costs of next-gen machines, but even though many gamers are employed and have enough disposable income to snap up these titles, for many the price is prohibitive. Yet the swing toward finding a bargain – either second-hand sales, waiting for a re-release or visiting a supermarket which may have a special offer promotion running – is seemingly denting the profits of publishers. Activision, TakeTwo and Electronic Arts have seen reduced revenue. And on the high street it seems some people are increasingly conservative about the amount they wish to spend on games.

In Manchester, Richard Johnson, a

BUYING LOW, SELLING HIGH

SO IS IT WORTH SELLING YOUR GAMES TO A HIGH STREET STORE, OR COULD YOU GET MORE ON EBAY? WITH A MINT-CONDITION COPY OF 2006 FIFA WORLD CUP GERMANY, WE DECIDED TO CHECK IT OUT.

First stop, Game. "Just one minute," said the friendly assistant as he thumbed through the price lists. "It depends on how many used copies of the game the company has received – the prices go up and down." There was a pause. "You'd get £18," he said. Not bad for a game selling at £29.99 full price. We decided to continue, however. Over at GameStation, we were told the same: "You'd get £18. It's all decided by head office." At Amazon's Marketplace, a 'like-new' copy of the game was up for sale for £27, but we decided, in the end, to try our luck on eBay.

Starting the bidding at 99p, we let the market decide the price. After five days, it had reached £8, but there was a surge over the last two days, with a bidding war in the final ten minutes seeing the price leap to £22.67. But then, of course, we had to wait seven days and go through the hassle of posting the game out.



Prices fluctuate in the shops. On eBay, the market decides.

It's a bit like the Stock Exchange. Er, like knowing when to buy and sell. Okay, we did only say 'a bit'.

32-year-old marketing assistant from Altrincham, Cheshire said, "Games are getting far too expensive, and when you have a few consoles like myself, you find you want to buy games for them all. I'd be bankrupt if I bought all my games at full price – the only way I can enjoy a wide variety is to choose pre-owned titles as well".

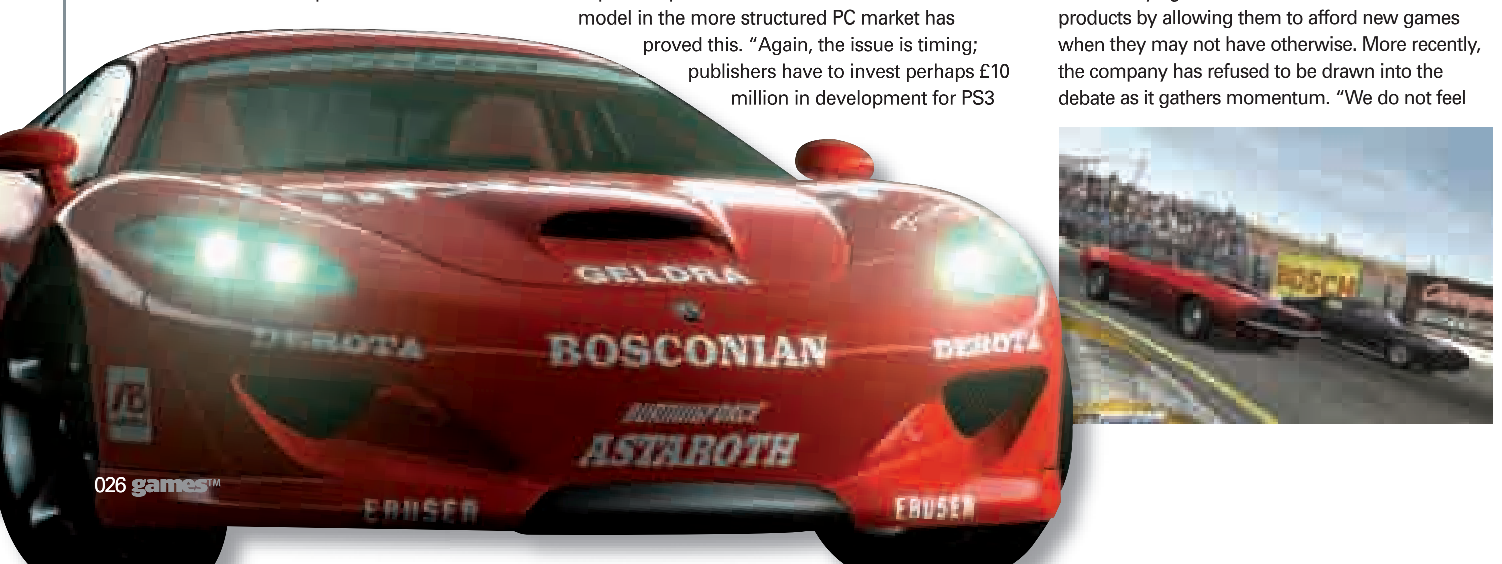
Katherine Hughes, aged 19, from Leeds said, "I always trade in my games. What's the point of keeping a game I've completed when I can take it to a shop and get some cash for it? I don't think Game or GameStation pay enough – I often get more on eBay – but I certainly think I should be able to do what I want with my game once I've bought it".

The pre-owned market is beginning to concern publishers as much as piracy – some even suggest selling second-hand titles is legalised piracy. Others see it as pushing prices down to the discounted level of supermarkets and online retailers. Some go as far as to say that second-hand games help reduce piracy by offering a nice package – disc, box, inlay – for a few quid. The truth is, piracy is as rife as ever with Trading Standards regularly swooping on 'game factories' set up in homes across Britain, and raiding dodgy car boot sales.

"My guess it that it has no visible impact on piracy at all," agrees Williams. "Those who wish to steal will always do so, but it may reduce slightly their wish to do so if they are putting in a lot of effort to steal only a small amount of price difference." He believes that the second-hand market can help to introduce people to titles they would otherwise overlook. Perhaps someone who buys *Pro Evo 2* will eventually decide to get the latest version. Williams said, "Inevitably the impulse purchasers can be upgraded to a more expensive purchase: the Mastertronic business model in the more structured PC market has proved this. "Again, the issue is timing; publishers have to invest perhaps £10 million in development for PS3 titles, £3 million to secure a licence and £5 million to manufacture. If they do not get a reasonable shelf life, they can't recoup – if *Pro Evo 2* was on sale at £2.50 two months after its £29.99 release then what damage does that cause to the full-price model?"

Can the second-hand market increase the shelf life of a game, though? Williams thinks not: "The publishers would argue that good titles would stay on shelves longer if it were not for pre-owned. It reduces the number of re-orders – which are essential to their business – that stores will place with them on a new title. Consumer demand keeps a title alive – but only a fool would argue that a bargain price will not drive that demand. For the publishers it is really only a question of timing and return on development expenditure."

Game has always defended its pre-owned market, saying trade-ins drive the sale of new products by allowing them to afford new games when they may not have otherwise. More recently, the company has refused to be drawn into the debate as it gathers momentum. "We do not feel



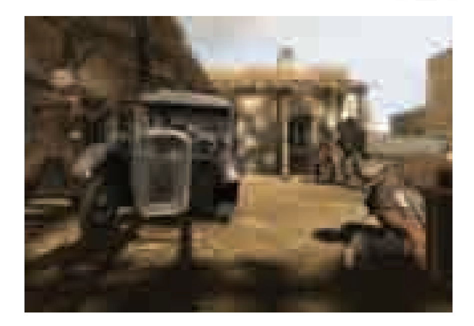

Halo 2 will cost you £40 new, but play it, trade it in, and get another game. Simple as.

we have anything else to add to the debate," said PR executive Fiona Haldane.

The only way the publishers could win is by persuading retailers like Game to cut back on pre-owned games. But there's little chance of that when the company knows its market so well – people wanting to get hold of the latest Nintendo DS Lite, for example, are being enticed into parting with their old DS. If they do so, they can get the Lite for £59.99. It doesn't take a genius to work out that they will have sold their old-style DS for £30 – a machine Game sells second hand for £64.99. But Game knows fine well that gamers like the latest gear.

Of course, software houses could make gamers sign an agreement to refrain from reselling their games – a simple tick in an 'Agree' box would do the trick if the correct clause was inserted into the licensing agreement that no one really reads. And as a last resort, publishers could refuse to allow high street retailers access to their products on the condition that they drop second-hand games, effectively holding them to ransom. But this would pose more problems than it would solve. Legal experts say this would be anti-competitive since it would artificially maintain prices. Williams said, "There's little point in restricting the market. The casual buyer always seeks a bargain, and good games sell over time, so there will always be a demand for cut-price entry to the gaming scene. PlayStations get passed down to younger brothers who don't have the same purchasing power – they also want a bargain."

But of course the uneasy alliance between publishers and retailers could be shattered forever if digital distribution takes off. Already seen with Xbox Live, games could one day be downloaded direct from the publisher, negating the need for physical media. It would make it near impossible to sell games second hand, thus crushing the market. For now, though, both sides are biting their tongues… it will be interesting to see how long before the gloves come off?



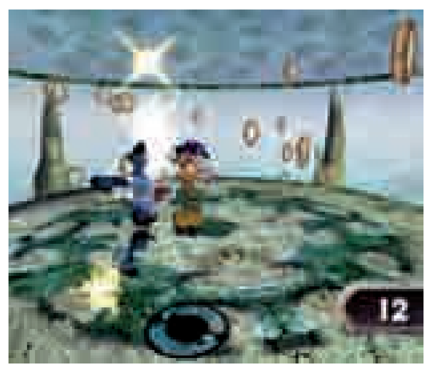


GAMES FOR 99P

WHAT CAN YOU GET FOR A QUID?

So how do shops ensure that they have a good stock of pre-owned titles for newer machines within a few months of them hitting the shelves? By holding enticing promotions, that's how. Game was able to bolster its pre-owned stocks of Xbox 360 games by offering gamers a 360 title for just 99p as long as they traded in two 360 games from their existing collection. For gamers who may have grabbed a couple of 360 games when they bought their machine, this was a pretty decent way of getting hold of something new to play. And doing the maths, it meant that they were getting around half price – £20 or so – for each of their old games. Game benefited by having more pre-owned games to sell.

Not to be outdone, GameStation regularly sells games for 99p, particularly on its website. Look out for the 'Pre-owned Thrill of the Week' – if you buy anything else at GameStation, you have a choice of 99p pre-owned games. We must warn you though, they're usually old and sometimes a bit crap – like *Vexx*.



You don't want to get swindled by ending up with a 'vexing' game.



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

A really 'special' example of technological design, the Gizmondo died a death.

"NOT SINCE THE CONNECTICUT LEATHER COMPANY CAME OUT TECHNOLOGICAL AMERICAN COMPANY PUT OUT AN

Lord help me, I just spent the last two hours playing *Colors* on the Gizmondo. You remember the Gizmondo? Hasn't been bankrupt that long. I recently came upon someone's secret stash of unreleased Giz games, and took as many as I could carry. I got most everything in there… I'm going to have to go back and trade my firstborn for the five other games he's got. But oh, how it will be worth my time. With 20 games, three consoles and various peripherals, I probably have the largest collection of unique Gizmondo products in the US. I'm so close; I might as well complete it. Why, you may ask? Because not since the Connecticut Leather Company came out with the Colecovision – which to be fair was a more than respectable console – has a non-technological American company put out an astonishing piece of hardware.

Gizmondo the company was owned by Tiger Telematics, a bizarre manifestation of an American flooring company based in Florida, the state where old folks go to die. How delightful, then, to play *Colors* – a flooring company-mandated, Swedish rendition of an urban-American environment. I bet Gizmondo boss Carl Freer laughed knowingly if he ever played the game. I mean, he's an honest-to-God crook, and he's probably actually done far worse things than you could ever do in *Colors*. Theoretically, that should make this the most accurate murder simulator ever.

The way the company scammed the investors and even two or three wayward game players was nothing short of genius. Take advantage of the gaming craze, steal some money, boost up your stocks, and then flee the scene in your Ferrari. It's true gangland rock and roll, is what it is.

Of course, it isn't a very good game, but it certainly is ridiculous. An associate of mine came across the poster for *Colors*, and was quite offended – it took me a minute to see why. It depicts a number of black men pointing menacing Gizmondos at you (I'd be scared), then says *Colors* at the bottom. "Might as well have called it 'Coloreds'," she said. Ouch. Turns out 'Colors' is sort of the name of the global black people gang so far as I can figure out. In one recent mission, I had to go tag the word over some Latino turf because it turns out the blacks hate the Latinos, and Latino people always start shooting at me the instant I (a black man) walk by. No racial profiling here, no sir. So yeah, I guess they've separated the gangs by race. Isn't that cute?

More gritty Swedishness at work – the first time I got busted by the police and sent to jail, I had three options for freedom. One chap offered a total pardon, and all my stuff back for $20,000. I didn't have that much money. Another fellow promised freedom for $7,000, presumably without my stuff, and I still didn't have the money. The last guy, well… he suggested that I had a very nice behind, and that all I needed to do was lose my anal virginity in



WITH THE COLECOVISION HAS A NON-ASTONISHING PIECE OF HARDWARE”

exchange for a bumpy ride to freedom. That's… almost realistic? It's rather hilarious to me that if you get caught by the police early on, and you likely will, the developer essentially makes you get raped. There aren't a whole lot of options. Oh, Scandinavia!

And of course the game world is populated almost exclusively by gangsters and police. It takes some effort to find an innocent bystander, and they can be hard to kill as they disappear when they hit buildings. The only women you'll find are prostitutes. Again, a relatively accurate description of America. Every once in a while the prostitutes will actually pay you $50 for sex, then tell you their tongue is, “off the hook,” which is a pretty accurate description of my daily life.

To be fair, most games don't stand up to this sort of scrutiny, released or unreleased. I mean, how much do hedgehogs really like rings? And when are they ever blue? And Italian men in overalls eating mushrooms for strength? Well okay, I guess I've seen that in the trailer parks a couple of times, but even so. When games aspire to realism, they invite this sort of thing. Have you ever wondered where Sonic stores all those rings? Mario at least has pockets.

Suffice to say, if you were somehow forced into possession of a Gizmondo, you'd do well to check out *Colors*. You can download it on the net and everything. It's the closest you can get to being in America without the unique smells and lack of power to affect your government. Oh, but have that too, don't you?

Many thanks
Brandon

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE



TOO MUCH FUN…

Went to Electronic Arts' offices last week to check out its new games. There was an obstacle course for dogs, a band with an EA public relations person as the drummer, and the most interesting thing to play was this little shuffleboard table we found. Later, pudgy high-school cheerleaders came out and yelled about a new college football game. Don't you wish these were the kinds of things you got to complain about?

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Warlords	TakeTwo	PC
2	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	DS
3	Brain Age	Nintendo	DS
4	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	Blizzard	PC
5	NCAA Football 2007	Electronic Arts	PS2
6	NCAA Football 2007	Electronic Arts	360
7	Big Brain Academy	Nintendo	DS
8	Half-Life 2: Episode One	Electronic Arts	PC
9	Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	GC
10	Prey	2K Games	360

(Updated 24/07/06)

New Super Mario Bros

Half-Life 2: Episode One



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

To this very day, not enough people have sampled the joys of playing Ubisoft's *Beyond Good And Evil*.

"TAKE THIS GAME TO YOUR PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR SLAP YOU IN THE FACE AND CALL YOUR MOTHER TO TELL HER

If someone hip compiled a list of the Things People Pretend They Know Which Really They Know Nothing About, I bet the works of Friedrich Nietzsche would show up somewhere, probably just above *Spellings Of German Words*. I'm not going to pretend to know anything about spelling things in German, nor am I going to pretend to know anything about Nietzsche aside from that he was born in Prussia, wrote in German, and knew Wagner. A quick Internet search tells me more: he was Christian and wrote about morality. I also know he's the game development community's philosopher of choice, with *Silicon Knights'* Denis Dyack dying to make a game called *Too Human* for over a decade, and Ubisoft's Michel Ancel having already put out the subtle critical favourite *Beyond Good And Evil*. However, nowhere is he more 'popular' than in Japan.

A colleague at my office tells me that Nietzsche wrote about Master Morality and Slave Morality. We relate this to videogames, and he recalls that *Pac-Man* creator Tooru Iwatani once referenced Nietzsche's Master-Slave moralities as an influence in an interview. "What a wacko thing that is to say," my colleague mused. We tried as hard as we could to overanalyse: in *Pac-Man*, the player is the mouth, and the ghosts oppress him. If *Pac-Man* swallows a Power Pellet, he becomes capable of eating his enemies. Not only that, in one brief clash of sound effects, the oppressors' colour changes, and their overtly simplistic behaviour (seek out the player) pulls a perfect 180: they are now running away. What does the Power Pellet represent? Something impressive, I'd imagine. So, without delving into the actual prose of Nietzsche, we were able to feel like we were talking about something sophisticated. (We were probably wrong.)

Also Sprach Zarathustra is an impressive title for a book. It gives the impression that one could grow up surrounded by the German language and never actually understand how cool it sounded until reading that title. I know this title because of the *Xenosaga* series of videogames. You see, *Xenosaga* games are about robots in space. Some of the robots are giant, vehicular types, and some are human sized. Some of the human-sized robots are shaped like gorgeous women, and some are shaped like little girls in mini-skirts. Some of the giant robots are piloted by humans, and some are piloted by human-sized robots. The games feature booming classical music and slick visuals of things exploding in slow motion in space. The first was the product of strict publisher pressure and sweeping creative vision. The creator later disappeared leaving the second-instalment calculated robot schlock with a German name. The third game, which uses the '*Zarathustra*' title, is schlock beyond schlock, dreck beyond dreck. If there are philosophical issues buried in this, I could not find them for all the dreck. The battle systems are snores, the dialogues are collections of polite introductions and vague laments, and the cut-scenes are long. There's a game in the way of the story, and a story in the way of the game. Take this game to your



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 47:

RECITING TITLES OF NIETZSCHE BOOKS

THESE ARE ENOUGH TO PROBABLY MAKE YOU SOUND REALLY COOL, IF MODERN JAPANESE POP-CULTURE IS ANY INDICATION. THEY WORK BEST AS STANDALONE SENTENCES (OR PERHAPS TOASTS) SPOKEN BEFORE TAKING A SHOT OF HARD LIQUOR AT A COMPANY PARTY…

Ningentekina, amarinimo ningentekina.	Human, all too human.
Zen'aku no higan.	Beyond good and evil.
Kenryoku e no ishi.	The will to power.
Tsuararatousutora wa kaku katariki.	Thus spake Zarathustra.
Higeki no tanjou.	The birth of tragedy.

AT OXFORD AND HE'D TO GET AN OPERATION"

philosophy professor at Oxford he'd slap you in the face and call your mother to tell her to get an operation.

Namco's *Trusty Bell: Chopin's Dream* is a 360 RPG by tri-Crescendo. The game, with pastel, anime-styled graphics, takes place in the mind of Frederic Chopin as he lies dying in Paris in 1849. He dreams of, "a world which is neither real nor fantasy." He sees the story of a dying girl with magical powers, and a plucky lad who'll guide her through a magical land where 16-hit combos are possible. Though the music will consist of Chopin's piano concertos performed by Russian pianist Stanislav Bunin, and it will likely sound classier than any game ever has, if you show the game's button-mashing battle system to a music snob, he'll throw up on your sneakers and then wipe his lips with a hanky.

What you must understand though, is that the Japanese approach Western philosophies and religions like you approach wearing red socks instead of white ones: it's just something to do.

Kind regards





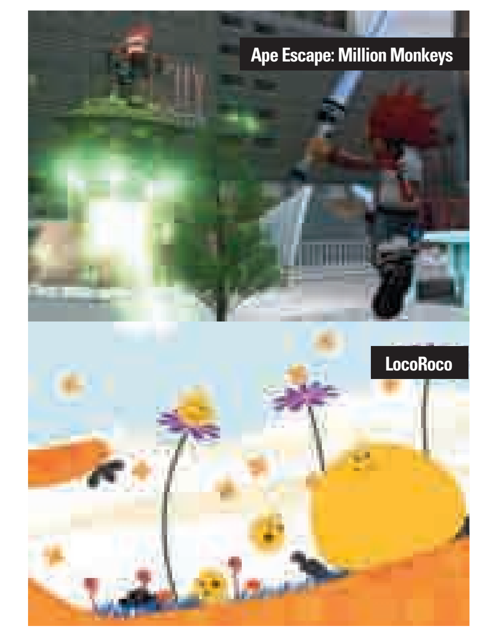
GUT, BOSE, GUT, BOSE – MOSTLY BOSE

Recently, a Japanese comic series called *Deathnote* ended its two-year run. It's a story in which a boy finds a notebook that will kill anyone whose name is written in it. Given this tool, he simply has to use it and so goes about killing criminals and other people he deems not 'worthy' of life. Then a famous detective begins to hunt him down, forcing the boy to deem anyone who opposes him also 'unworthy' of life. The story's concept alone raises valuable moral questions – for example, does the ease of the crime make it any less of a crime. For the first time in ages, Japan produced a story relevant to the modern political climate, a cautionary tale that could subtly educate and illuminate an entire generation. At one point in the *Deathnote* film, the main character is sitting at a table reading a book. The book is Nietzsche's *Jenseits Von Gut Und Bose*. The comic hadn't invoked Nietzsche's name even once; it had pleasantly drawn all of its moral arguments from a quaint little vacuum. And then the girlfriend of the guy next to me looks at that, points, and speaks, illuminating the quiet cinema, "*Xensaga Episode II* !?!?" I wonder.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Powerful Pro Baseball 13	Konami	PS2
2	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	DS
3	Persona 3	Atlus	PS2
4	Ape Escape: Million Monkeys	Sony	PS2
5	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
6	Project Hacker	Nintendo	DS
7	LocoRoco	Sony	PSP
8	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
9	Naruto RPG 3	Takara Tomy	DS
10	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS

(Updated week ending 16/07/06)


Ape Escape: Million Monkeys

LocoRoco

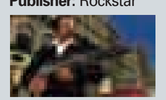
RELEASE LIST

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

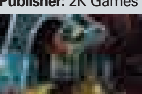


MULTI-FORMAT CHART

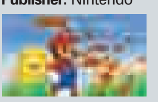
1 GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES
Format: PSP, PS2
Publisher: Rockstar



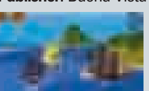
2 PREY
Format: 360, PC
Publisher: 2K Games



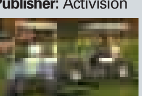
3 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS
Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo



4 PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST
Format: PSP
Publisher: Buena Vista



5 OVER THE HEDGE
Format: PS2, GC, PC, Xbox
Publisher: Activision



6 DR KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING: HOW OLD IS YOUR BRAIN?
Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo

7 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
Format: PS2, Xbox , PC, PSP
Publisher: Konami

8 2006 FIFA WORLD CUP
Format: All
Publisher: Electronic Arts

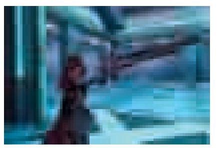
9 LOTR: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II
Format: 360, PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts

10 PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE LEGEND OF JACK SPARROW
Format: PC, PS2
Publisher: Ubisoft

THIS MONTH – AUGUST

Date	Title	Format
01 August	VeggieTales – LarryBoy And The Bad Apple	PS2, GBA
04 August	Monster House	DS, GBA, GC, PS2
04 August	SingStar Anthems	PS2
11 August	DarkStar One	PC
18 August	El Matador	PC
22 August	Dirge Of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	PS2
25 August	Disney's American Dragon	GBA
25 August	Paraworld	PC
25 August	Real World Golf 2007	PC, PS2
25 August	Spinout	PSP
28 August	Star Fox Command	DS
TBC	Battlefront	PC
TBC	Battle Of B-Daman	PC
TBC	Call Of Juarez	PC
TBC	Cargo Pilot	PC
TBC	The Cheetah Girls	GBA
TBC	CivCity: Rome	PC
TBC	Contact	DS
TBC	Dance Factory	PS2
TBC	Enchanted Arms	360
TBC	Eureka Seven Vol 1: The New Wave	PS2
TBC	Faces Of War	PC
TBC	GTR2	PC
TBC	Gun Club	PS2
TBC	King Of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2	PS2
TBC	Let's Make A Soccer Team	PS2
TBC	Madden NFL '07	All
TBC	Naval Combat Pack	PC
TBC	Pac-Man World Rally	GC, PC, PS2, PSP
TBC	Perimeter: Emperor's Testament	PC
TBC	Phil Of The Future	GBA
TBC	Play With Fire	PC
TBC	Rag Doll Kung-Fu	PC
TBC	The Suite Life Of Zack And Cody	GBA, DS

VIEWPOINT



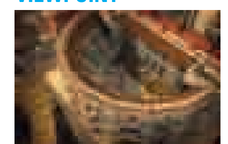
DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII
Format: PS2
Publisher: SquareEnix
Avoid like the most deadly of plagues. Tarnishes the great name of *Final Fantasy VII*.

VIEWPOINT



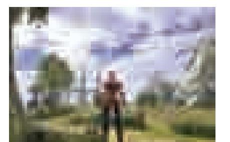
PARAWORLD
Format: PC
Publisher: Deep Silver
Awesome looking dinosaur-based RTS, getting the **games™** review treatment next month.

VIEWPOINT



CIVCITY: ROME
Format: PC
Publisher: 2K Games
Enduring Meier-inspired city builder that deserves attention. Will suck your summer away.

VIEWPOINT



ENCHANTED ARMS
Format: 360
Publisher: Ubisoft
The long-awaited European release of 360's first traditional RPG is not guaranteed for August, but we live in hope.

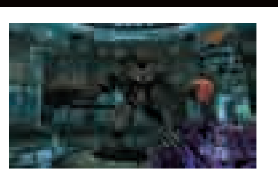
BARGAIN BASEMENT

The best deals this month

VIEWTIFUL JOE
Format: PS2
Publisher: Capcom
Where: Woolworths
Price: £3.99

Less than four English pounds for one of the finest and most stylish videogames of the last generation? You would be mad as box of frogs to miss out on this total bargain. Polish up on your Viewtiful skills and get down to Woolies quick smart.





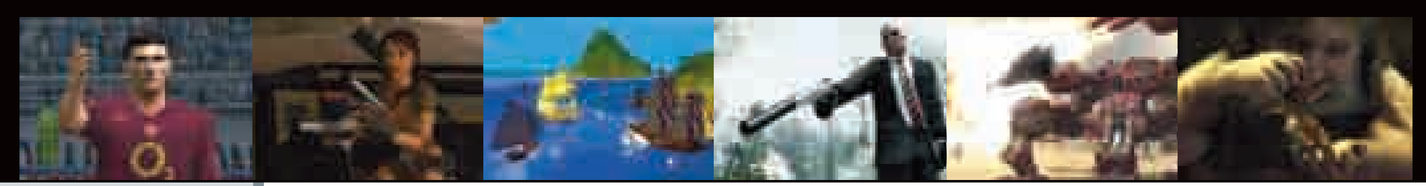
METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES
Format: GC **Publisher:** Nintendo
Where: HMV **Price:** £4.99

It may not be as good as the original, but you can't sniff at one of Cube's greatest moments for under a fiver.



MEGA MAN POWERED UP
Format: PSP **Publisher:** Capcom
Where: Gameplay.co.uk **Price:** £14.99

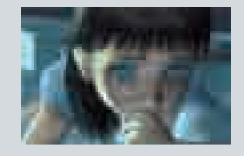
A fine slice of ultra-hard PSP platforming at a very welcoming price. Exactly the type of product that PSP is designed for.



games™ IMPORT WATCH

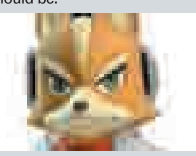
XENOSAGA: EPISODE III

Format: PS2
Publisher: Namco
Classic RPG action translated for the US market, *Xenosaga III* is the final instalment in this epic trilogy. Once again dipping into such themes as existentialism and deep philosophy, this is not one for the masses.



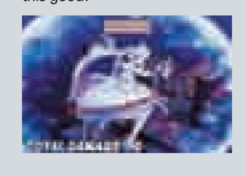
STAR FOX COMMAND

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Hitting the US right at the end of the month, the highly anticipated *Star Fox DS* looks set to recapture the *Lylat Wars* glory years. It's all about the on-rails, spaceship-flying, shooting action – just as it should be.



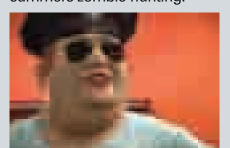
DISGAEA 2

Format: PS2
Publisher: Atlus
The return of perennial **games™** favourite *Disgaea* is welcomed with open arms. Very much more of the same, but since when has that been a problem when the game's this good?



DEAD RISING

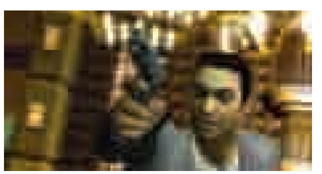
Format: 360
Publisher: Capcom
The American's get their hands on Frank West's blood-fuelled adventure a few weeks before us, so any eager 360 importers can spend the end of their summers zombie hunting.



SEPTEMBER

Date	Title	Format
01 Sept	Gangs Of London	PSP
01 Sept	Saint's Row	360
01 Sept	Tekken: Dark Resurrection	PSP
08 Sept	B-Boy	PS2, PSP
08 Sept	War Front: Turning Point	PC
11 Sept	Mario Hoops 3-On-3	DS
15 Sept	Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	PS2
15 Sept	Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death	PC
15 Sept	Call Of Juarez	PC
15 Sept	Desperate Housewives	PC
15 Sept	Yakuza	PS2
18 Sept	Pokémon: Mystery Dungeon Red/Blue	DS, GBA
22 Sept	Def Jam FFNY: The Takeover	PSP
22 Sept	Guilty Gear	DS
29 Sept	Company Of Heroes	PC
29 Sept	Every Extend Extra	PSP
TBC	ATV Offroad Fury 4	PS2
TBC	Call Of Cthulhu: Destiny's End	PC
TBC	Dark Messiah Of Might & Magic	PC
TBC	The Godfather	360 , PSP
TBC	Harvest Moon	DS
TBC	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	GC
TBC	Heroes Of Annihilated Empires	PC
TBC	LMA Manager 2007	360, PC, PS2
TBC	Mercury Meltdown	PSP
TBC	Ninety-Nine Nights	360
TBC	Resident Evil 4	PC
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	GC, PC, PS2,
TBC	Tenchu Dark Secret	DS
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	360
TBC	Ultimate Ghosts 'N' Goblins	PSP
TBC	World Championship Snooker 2007	360, PC, PS2

FORWARD THINKING…

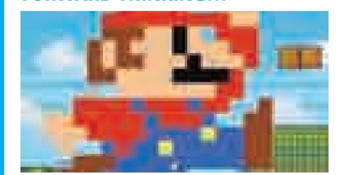


YAKUZA
Format: PS2
Publisher: Sega
The spiritual successor to *Shenmue* is almost here, with a 'star' cast and a million cut-scenes.
15 September

OCTOBER

Date	Title	Format
06 Oct	Barnyard	GBA, GC, PC, PS2
09 Oct	Super Paper Mario	GC
13 Oct	Warlords Champions	DS, PSP
20 Oct	Destroy All Humans! 2	Xbox
20 Oct	GTA: Vice City Stories	PSP

FORWARD THINKING…



SUPER PAPER MARIO
Format: GC
Publisher: Nintendo
This is looking superb. Gorgeous, wildly inventive and full of typical Nintendo charm
9 October

Date	Title	Format
TBC	Alone In The Dark	360, PC, PS3
TBC	Avatar: The Last Airbender	DS, GBA, GC, PC, PS2, PSP, Wii, Xbox
TBC	Bomberman	PSP
TBC	Bomberman: Act Zero	360
TBC	Call Of Duty 3	360, PS2, Xbox
TBC	Crackdown	360
TBC	Deep Labyrinth	DS
TBC	F.E.A.R.	360
TBC	Gun Showdown	PSP
TBC	Joint Task Force	PC
TBC	Just Cause	360, PC, PS2, Xbox
TBC	Justice League Heroes	DS, PS2, PSP, Xbox
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	PS2
TBC	Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	DS, GBA, GC, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
TBC	Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	360, GBA, PC, PS2, PS3, PSP, Wii, Xbox
TBC	NHL 2K7	360, PS2, PS3, Xbox
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	360, DS, PC, PS2, PSP
TBC	Reservoir Dogs	PC, PS2, Xbox
TBC	Rule Of Rose	PS2
TBC	Sam & Max	PC
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	PC, PS2, Xbox
TBC	Star Trek: Legacy	360, PC
TBC	Tony Hawk's Project 8	360, PS2, PS3, PSP

NOVEMBER

Date	Title	Format
24 Nov	Flushed Away	DS, GBA, GC, PS2
TBC	Avalon	PS3
TBC	Dark Sector	PS3
TBC	The Darkness	PS3
TBC	Devil May Cry 4	PS3
TBC	Fatal Inertia	PS3
TBC	Fight Night Round 3	PS3
TBC	Football Manager 2007	PC, PSP
TBC	The Getaway	PS3
TBC	Gran Turismo HD	PS3
TBC	Heavenly Sword	PS3
TBC	Killzone Liberation	PSP
TBC	Ni-Oh	PS3
TBC	WarHawk	PS3
TBC	WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2007	360, PS2, PSP

TBC '06

Date	Title	Format
TBC	Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	360, PC, PS3
TBC	Forza Motorsport 2	360
TBC	Gears Of War	360
TBC	Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising	PC
TBC	Lumines 2	PSP
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	360, PC, PS2
TBC	Silent Hill Origins	PSP
TBC	Sonic Rivals	PSP
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	360, PS3
TBC	Stranglehold	360, PC, PS3
TBC	Too Human	360
TBC	Viva Piñata	360

TBC '07

Date	Title	Format
TBC	Assassin's Creed	PS3
TBC	Coded Arms Assault	PS3
TBC	God Of War 2	PS2
TBC	Grand Theft Auto IV	360, PS3
TBC	Halo 3	360
TBC	Heart Of Empire: Rome	PC
TBC	Indiana Jones 2007	360, PS3
TBC	Lost Planet	360
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	PSP
TBC	Need For Speed Carbon	All
TBC	Phoenix Wright: Justice for All	DS
TBC	Rogue Galaxy	PS2
TBC	Sega Rally	360, PS3
TBC	Virtua Fighter 5	PS3
TBC	Virtua Tennis 3	360, PS3

FORWARD THINKING…



LOST PLANET
Format: 360
Publisher: Capcom
The Live demo has whetted our appetites, and now we're more than ready for the real thing.
2007

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

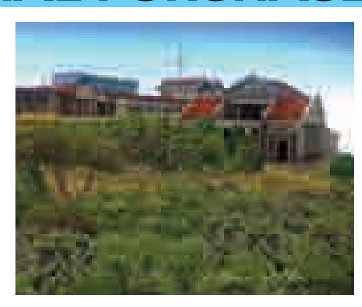
ESSENTIAL PURCHASE

You'll definitely be wanting these

CIVCITY: ROME

Format: PC
Publisher: 2K Games

This month, there aren't that many great games for us to recommend, however, we definitely think you should listen up when we mention 2K's excellent city builder *CivCity: Rome.* It may begin slowly, but after a few hours you can feel your life slowly being sucked away as you get ever more enthralled by the lives of your little villagers and their plights.

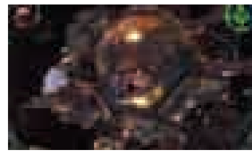




ENCHANTED ARMS

Format: 360 **Publisher:** Ubisoft

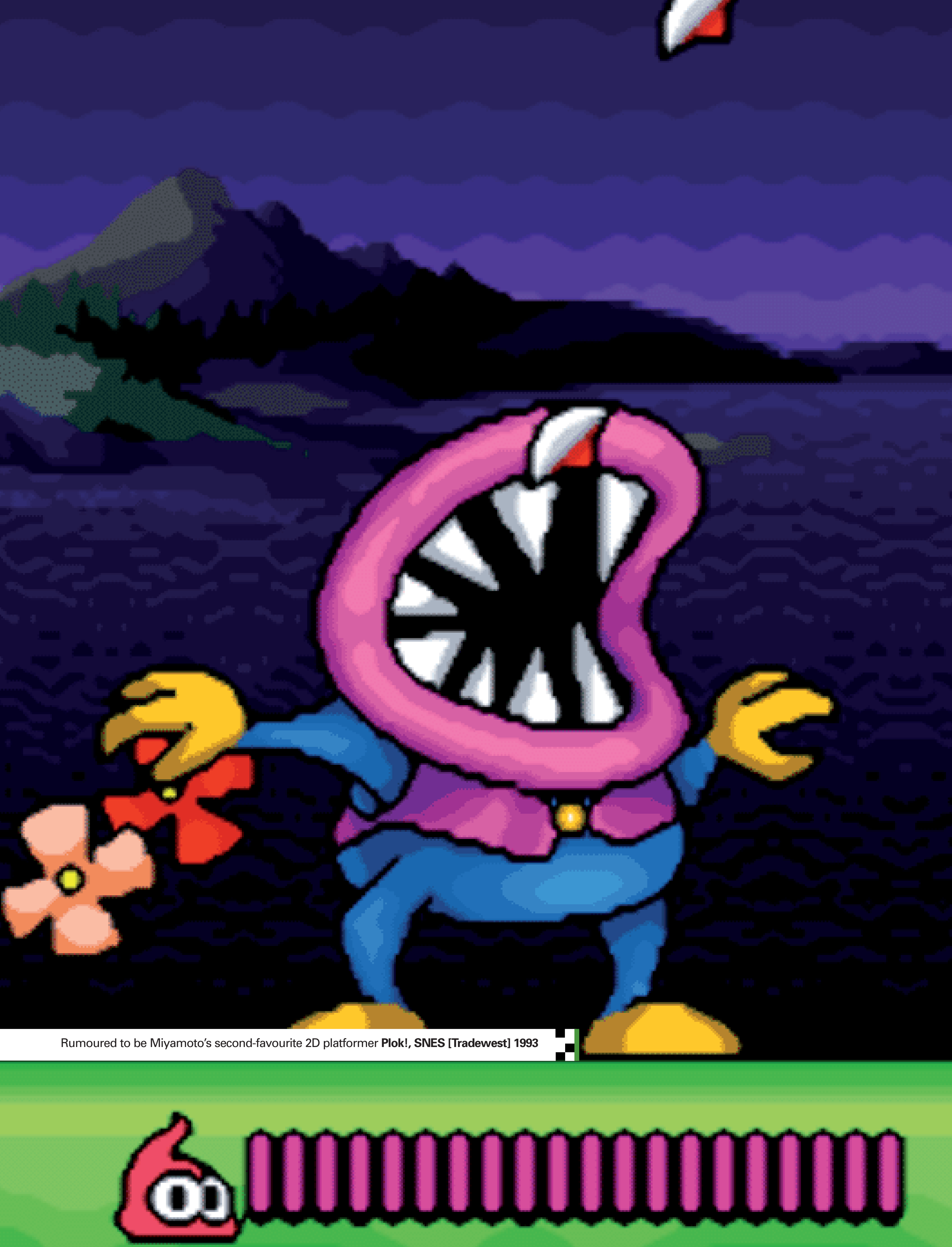
We've played enough of the Japanese version to know that this is a solid RPG with outstanding good looks – just what many 360 owners are after.



DARKSTAR ONE

Format: PC **Publisher:** CDV

You know it's a quiet month when a German strategy game makes it into the essential purchases. Epic, pretty, and only a tad dull.



Rumoured to be Miyamoto's second-favourite 2D platformer **Plok!, SNES [Tradewest] 1993**



BATTLEFIELD 2142



"BATTLEFIELD IS A BIG SANDBOX – WE PUT ALL THE TOYS IN THERE AND THEN IT'S UP TO THE PLAYERS TO CREATE THE EXPERIENCE"
MARCUS NILSSON, SENIOR PRODUCER, DICE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
BATTLE BATTLE BATTLEFIELD

BATTLEFIELD 2 + MECHS × THAT STAR WARS CORRIDOR SCENE = BATTLEFIELD 2142

■ The Titan itself can fire upon the ground, but only with a correspondingly limited range.

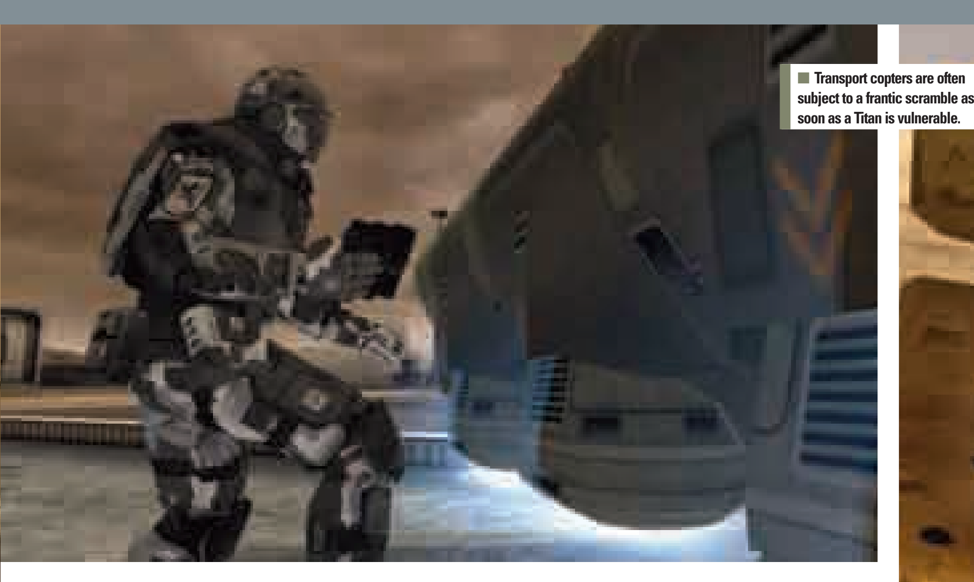


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ By the time you read this, DICE offices will have moved to one of the trendiest areas of Stockholm. DICE started off making pinball, horseracing and rally-driving games before the notoriously buggy *Codename Eagle* established it as a potential master of multi-player, at which point it was snapped up by EA.

HISTORY

- **BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT** 2005 [Multi]
- **BATTLEFIELD 1942** 2002 [PC]
- **CODENAME EAGLE** 2000 [PC]



■ Transport copters are often subject to a frantic scramble as soon as a Titan is vulnerable.



SHOOTING MECHS IN THE KNEES SINCE 2006

Our viewing of *Battlefield 2142* in Stockholm opened with a refreshingly frank admission by the game's senior producer: the *Battlefield* games have always been inexcusably bug-ridden. The problem with an exclusively multi-player game, he went on to explain to us, is that there are no scripted events, and so however thoroughly you test it players are always going to find something that hasn't been found before and will subsequently proceed to break the game in whatever way they can.

Battlefield's players are especially creative with the exploits that invariably make it into the release versions as anyone who played *Battlefield 2* in its first week on sale will know. Within days, DICE's huge and active fan base had found ways to drop vehicles onto buildings, make themselves invincible and otherwise abuse the game to within an inch of its life – even now, patching has not entirely resolved the problems, as each new patch version invariably introduces yet more possibilities. That, though, is the price we pay for a combat environment as free as that of the *Battlefield* titles – a thought that does little to comfort us when we're spitting with rage as players use the latest patch problem to camp inside buildings, rendering themselves invincible.

It is partly because of its games' notorious awkwardness in terms of quality assurance that Digital Illusions has decided to stick with the *Battlefield 2* engine for this next instalment of the series; most of its bugs have already been found. The development team's familiarity with the engine also allows for graphical improvement that would otherwise have been much more labour-intensive. *Battlefield 2142*, though, is far from just an update. It's an altogether more polished and inventive product than *Battlefield 2*, and of course the new futuristic setting gives it a creative flair that games based exclusively on modern or historic warfare struggle to achieve.

DICE has been notably cautious with its setting, not letting itself go crazy with particle transporters, laser guns and other such sci-fi nonsense, concentrating instead on creating a warfare experience that is both novel and believable. Character roles and classes are familiar from *Battlefield 2* – namely Recon (a combination of Special-Ops and Sniper from *BF2*), Engineer, Assault (combined with Medic) and Support. Vehicles and weapons, although given a futuristic makeover and occasionally prefixed with the words 'hover' or 'plasma', are still recognisably assault rifles, tanks, jeeps and grenades. Consequently this game strikes a perfect balance between new and exciting technology to play with and a form of war that we can easily recognise and understand, evolving *Battlefield* without making it so radically different as to require a whole new learning curve for veterans of the series.

> "THIS, IN SHORT, IS ABSOLUTE GENIUS"

Battlefield 2142's revolution, then, is not a new engine or a radically altered play mechanic. It is its new form of combat, Titan mode, wherein each team has its own Titan – a mother ship of sorts – to defend against invasion. On the ground the battle is for the missile silos, which, once captured, fire missiles into the air at intervals at the opposing side's Titan – at this stage it's exactly like capturing checkpoints in *Battlefield 2*. Once the great ship's shields are down, however, battle transfers to the sky as the aggressors rush for APCs and flying

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: DICE
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 2-64 Online/LAN

CONCEPT

■ *Battlefield* evolved, set in a futuristic world and with an increased influence on individual development.

STABBING GROUND

Knifing people in *Battlefield* brings its own satisfaction, but DICE has decided that we need more of an incentive. Stabbing people without detection earns you players' dog tags, and not just until the end of the match – you keep them for ever. Apparently, in alpha testing at DICE, people were so preoccupied with getting others' dog tags that pretty much every player was flat on the ground at all times, looking for an unsuspecting target. It's also possible that after a certain number of knife kills, your knife-kill animation will change into a flashier, more elaborate one. Who says videogames encourage violence?



Mechs are easily taken down by shooting them in the knees, or through a disturbingly placed vent.

That flying thing looks like Floyd from *Jet Force Gemini*.

"THE FACT THAT WE'VE BASED IT ON EXISTENT TECH MEANS THAT WE CAN BUILD UPON IT – THE LAUNCH OF THIS IS GOING TO BE MUCH LESS BUGGY"
MARCUS NILSSON, SENIOR PRODUCER, DICE

vehicles capable of transporting them to the enemy mother ship and the defence pods in order to protect it.

From there the fights are in the corridors of the giant ship as the assaulting team aims to destroy the core control consoles in sequence. The defence will typically be holed up in corners or behind bits of scenery, trying to stop the assault on the core while the other team lobs grenades and explosives at consoles, hoping that they or their defenders will catch the blast and give them a free shot at the core. Of course, while all of this is going on, someone could be running around down on the ground capturing the neglected silos in order to launch a counterattack on the other Titan, meaning that the tide of battle can turn at any time.

This, in short, is absolute genius. Thrown straight into a hectic 25-odd-player round of Titan mode during our playtest, things were at first a little overwhelming; before long, though, we were pressed against the wall of a corridor inside the enemy Titan, handing grenades to our squad leader before he ran out into the open to lob them at a destructible console, only to be picked off by a sniper hiding beneath it. The exhilaration of a core assault as part of a team is pretty much incomparable; similarly, lying crouched on the floor on the last front before the core and managing to pick off aggressors with panicked machine gun fire is one of the best defensive experiences we've yet seen in a combat videogame.

In *Battlefield 2*, you were capturing checkpoints for the sake of capturing checkpoints – in *2142*, you're capturing missile silos so that you can get up in the air for the real battle to begin. It's pretty much essential to work in squads, especially defensively, as you'll need ammo, healing and co-operation from your team-mates in order to fend off an assault. With 25 players, this was superb. With 64, we can see it being one of the best experiences that online gaming has ever offered.

There are also more rewards for playing as part of an effective squad in *2142*. Helping fellow players by handing out ammo or providing support gets you more points at the end of a game, and when you're part of a squad, any enemy that any member of your squad can see is highlighted as a red diamond on your own HUD. This gives you a basic idea of what dangers might be ahead. As you advance in rank, the points that you earn during battle contribute significantly to your development. Skills in *Battlefield 2142* can be bought or upgraded in various skill trees, such as medical and engineering,

"BATTLEFIELD 2142 IS USHERING IN A VERY EXCITING TIME FOR ONLINE WARFARE"

allowing you to tune your abilities on the battlefield to your own personal tendencies as a player. This is a level of persistence far beyond that of *Battlefield 2* which offered little more than the occasional unlock of a new weapon, and DICE confidently predicts that it will keep people playing in order to reach the next reward.

With Titan mode providing such a fresh and exciting new form of combat in addition to the classic modes, we doubt that anyone will need much incentive from unlockables and medals to get addicted to *2142*. The game will soon be entering beta testing ahead of its winter release – get in fast, and you might yet have a chance to sample this superb war game before it hits the shelves. *Battlefield 2142* might just cause a quiet revolution. Along with *Quake Wars: Enemy Territory*, it's ushering in a very exciting time for online warfare.

MECHTACULAR (SORRY)

Yes, *Battlefield 2142* has mechs, but they're not as game breaking as they might have been. We envisioned single-pilot mech suit type things like those in *Matrix Revolutions*, but they're actually dual-pilot walking machines. At first they seem practically indestructible – indeed, tanks and other vehicles will have little chance against them – but go in on foot and manage to get between their legs, and they have a ventilation shaft weak spot. Shooting them in the knees or in specific other weak areas also yields results against these walking war machines – we give it two weeks before people manage pixel-perfect mech takedowns, rendering them useless…



The backdrops are suitably post-apocalyptic and grey.



Not something you generally want waiting round a corner.

ARMY OF TWO

TWO HEADS REALLY COULD BE BETTER THAN ONE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

When there's a war, political turmoil and the mother of all conspiracies against you, one character is just not going to be enough. It's a good job you have two.

Teamwork is generally a good thing. A huddle before a match or a needlessly long week entrusting colleagues to catch a falling you are all things done solely because this is a recognised fact and the benefits are obvious. When Live was introduced, allowing you and your console 'proper' online play, further benefits were revealed, as well as the chance to practice the teamwork philosophy regularly. We have now become adept at working as team; series such as *Ghost Recon*, *Battlefield* and the like have ensured that we learn to play well with others and co-operate in a manner that lets us reap maximum benefits from titles. It seems, though, that co-op is about to get a bit of a shake up.

Army Of Two has been built from the ground up as the ultimate co-operative title. It has moved away from squad-based and team-led titles and has opted to rely on only two characters. This isn't a new idea; *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* recently offered a Co-op mode that allowed two players to take on the game's AI and a number of built-for-two environments. *Army Of Two*, however, looks to scoop up the idea and run with it – in a very destructive and well thought out manner.

> "THE SWELLING OCEAN HAS NEVER LOOKED THIS IMPRESSIVE IN A VIDEOGAME"

It's still very early days, but what has been evident has been extremely impressive. A number of set pieces have been presented to show the various elements of team play available and it seems that EA is creating a nice mix of genres here. The actual look and feel of the game is very tough. Hardened mercenary types, using bulky weaponry, taking on an entire army… it's all very gung-ho, but the team play element has been comfortably forced into place as a result.

Obviously, you're outnumbered; there are two of you and lots of them. Aiding your partner when he's been shot is all well and good, but it won't help take out a batch of 20 hidden enemies. Getting your partner to drive a forklift and lift you over a pile of crates so you can get off a couple of surprise rounds on the other hand – that'll just about do it.

It's elements such as this that stand to make *Army Of Two* one of the finest co-op experiences yet, and the fact that your number two can be controlled either by AI or a second player means that the experience isn't lost when you're forced to play alone – something from which a fair few other titles have suffered greatly in the past.

So far, it all seems like little more than enhancement on what's already been seen – even if said enhancements are needed greatly and combine to make a rather natty looking title – but there are elements that truly surprise. A dabble with the single-player campaign showed that, although while in this mode your AI-controlled friend is given orders by you, there is a certain amount of 'pushing back'. For example, if you opt to snipe while your team-mate distracts, and you miss the shot, the next time a similar situation occurs there's a fair chance you'll find your orders are ignored and your 'buddy' will simply curse, remind you of how you messed up last time and take the shot himself – regardless of whether you order him to leave it to you or not. Again, with elements such as this, along with the now seemingly customary stunning visuals, *Army Of Two* could turn out to be one of EA's finest original IPs.

WATER WAY TO GO

So, we're watching the *Army Of Two* demo that the people from EA were good enough to present for us, we see the multi-player aspects, we're impressed by the elements featured – then they show us the 'boat bit'. The characters are in a dinghy, they are at sea, and the people presenting the game are smiling and watching our faces for a reaction. The reason? That's some damn fine water we're looking at. The swelling ocean has never looked this impressive in a videogame before. Though, that said, there's a lot of good water on the horizon. *BioShock* is certainly promising much when it comes to the wet stuff. We wonder who'll come out on top…?



A sinking aircraft carrier is exactly where you don't want to be standing. Cue heroic rescue cut-scene.

Working as a team is what this title is all about, and there'll be many set pieces that force you to make use of your colleague.



CO-OP PROFILE

For years, we were happy to play games alone. Multi-player was a bonus and, while enjoyed when it did appear, it was no disadvantage should a title contain no extra-player feature. Now, thanks to Live, single-player is starting to take a backseat to co-op, and playing alone is becoming the bonus. It's a funny old world.

HISTORY

- **SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY** 2005 [Multi]
- **BATTLEFIELD 1942** 2002 [Multi]
- **HALO** 2002 [Xbox]

Never have you met two meaner looking characters. We bet they're nice chaps really.

"THIS IS THE GAME WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO CREATE"

REID SCHNEIDER, SENIOR PRODUCER, EA MONTRÉAL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BOTH ONE AND TWO OF A KIND

ARMY x TWO x TEAMWORK = ARMY OF TWO



Helping fallen comrades is especially important when there are only two of you.

SONIC WILD FIRE (WORKING TITLE)

■ Thanks to the restrictive area, the camera does a great job of panning around without hindering your game.

"SONIC WILD FIRE AND THE INNOVATIVE WII CONTROLLER CHANGE THE WAY GAMERS PLAY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT"
SCOTT A STEINBERG, VICE PRESIDENT, SEGA OF AMERICA

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BORN TO BE WILD

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG + NEW CONTROLS x ARABIAN NIGHTS = SONIC WILD FIRE

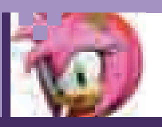




■ We're kind of sad that Sonic will be on his own this time. We're going to miss Amy Rose.

SONIC WILD FIRE (WORKING TITLE)

NINTENDO Wii



FRIENDS PROFILE

■ It's a long time since Sonic has embarked on an adventure on his own. With each new instalment of the series comes a batch of new characters who help/hinder him on his way. Big the Cat is a good example of how well these characters have been utilised – Charmy the Bee isn't.

HISTORY

- **CREAM THE RABBIT** Sonic Advance 2 [2003]
- **BIG THE CAT** Sonic Adventure [1999]
- **MILES 'TAILS' PROWER** Sonic The Hedgehog 2 [1992]

SEGA TAKES A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Moving with the times is something that we've all had to do. Untrained fingers are now required to fumble with eight-buttoned controllers rather than the straightforward examples seen on 8-bit machines, but we're not the only ones who've been forced to evolve. The games we play have also been changing, and there are very few that have managed to retain popularity throughout the entire journey so far – the *Sonic The Hedgehog* franchise is obviously one of those few.

Sonic grew from the most basic of formulas. Although the occasionally quite weak 3D offerings have shaken the dedicated fan base a fair few times over the last couple of years, there's no denying that impressive feats have also been achieved. A wealth of variously attributed characters have been introduced to 'mix up' gameplay, new villains, new modes of transportation, new worlds… No matter how much you think you hated *Sonic Heroes*, the attempt was a worthy one and – if you're capable of ignoring a poor camera, at least – the game is actually a very pleasant experience.

Now, in true form, *Sonic* has changed once again. Nintendo Wii is simplifying the way we play games, appealing to all and going back to basics. *Sonic* has followed suit by giving many what they've wanted for a long while: a Sonic game that focuses solely on speed, fun and accessibility.

Obviously, as with many of the Wii titles that have been revealed, it's the way in which the game is controlled that provides much of the interest. Holding the Wii remote as you would a pad and then tilting left and right will see the constantly accelerating hedgehog move across the track accordingly and a quick jolt forward will trigger a homing dash attack. Button 2 will perform a jump. And that's about it, really. As we said before, accessibility seems to be a focus here, so stripped-down controls, no matter how innovative, would always inevitably feature.



"THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF PLAY SAW US HITTING EVERYTHING THAT WASN'T RING-SHAPED"

The real surprise is how well it all works. There are many sceptics out there when it comes to discussing the Wii control methods. For every person who agrees that a fresh approach is what the industry needs, there are two equally opinionated chaps questioning the reasoning of such an act, but after a quick play session – the only kind of play session available at events such as E3 – it's obvious that *Sonic Wild Fire* has plenty of potential and could well go some way to removing the memories of *Shadow The Hedgehog* from our scarred minds.

We're not saying that the controls don't take a little getting used to – the first five minutes of play saw us hitting everything that wasn't ring-shaped – but once you get used to the slightly twitchy nature of the title, it all seems far easier, and spectacular scenes at high speeds are very achievable.

Aiding these scenes is the way in which the camera has been used. Thanks to the 'tunnel' style of each of the stages, the camera issues that have tragically haunted many of Sonic's more recent offerings don't seem to make an appearance – well, they didn't during our time with the title anyhow. In fact, a well-positioned camera actually treated us to some fairly reasonable cinematic moments. Sure, we're aware that this may have all been put in place to appear during our time with the game – what we've been witness to may end up being the very best the title will offer – but these early signs definitely hold promise. Besides, let's face it, nobody really wants to be doubtful of Sonic.

■ The environments are certainly looking a little different from what we've come to expect from *Sonic* titles. We still want Green Hill Zone, though.

PRETTY AS A PICTURE

We're not entirely sure of the plot involved with *Sonic Wild Fire*, but we do know that Sonic has somehow ended up running around the pages of *Arabian Nights* in an effort to collect up the few pages that have been stolen. It may all sound a little unusual, but this theme certainly provides some lovely areas for the little chap to sprint around in. Gorgeous–looking oases and mosaics fill the levels and provide some of the most vibrant environments ever seen in a *Sonic* title – apart from Casino Night Zone obviously.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '07
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Play as Sonic once again as you attempt to find the missing pages of the book you've been trapped within.

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS





■ Sometimes, you just can't beat a good explosion. Snake knows this better than most.

> "THE GAME WILL BE THE MISSING LINK IN THE ONGOING METAL GEAR SAGA"
> KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

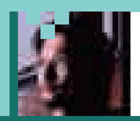
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BIG BOSS MAN

MGS3 + SPLINTER CELL × PSP = PORTABLE OPS

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Hideo Kojima. The man. The legend. There are very few 'names' in videogame development, but his is most certainly one of the most important. Responsible for one of the greatest franchises in gaming, and perhaps its most interesting character, Kojima continues to confound critics with his assault on post-modern interactive entertainment.

HISTORY



- ■ METAL GEAR SOLID 1998 [PSOne]
- ■ METAL GEAR SOLID 2 2001 [PS2]
- ■ METAL GEAR SOLID 3 2004 [PS2]

SNAKE'S AC!D DAYS ARE OVER

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA 2007
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

■ A full-blown *Metal Gear Solid* game for PSP, built from the ground up with portable play in mind, and featuring four-player Wi-Fi action.

The *Metal Gear* saga is surely the most fascinating story in all of gaming. It may have its critics, and for good reason – overly long cut-scenes, unnecessary subplots, subtexts and a heady dose of convolution – but very little else manages to tug at the heart strings like Kojima's epic franchise. And this is why the announcement of *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* is very exciting news. Far from a casual spin-off or lacklustre remake, this is set to be *Metal Gear*'s Anakin/Darth Vader story – chronicling all the unanswered questions about Big Boss aka Naked Snake's move to the 'Dark Side', and the creation of FOXHOUND. Konami is even promising, "Naked Snake's greatest tragedy – a loss that sets into motion the events of later games in the *Metal Gear Solid* timeline". Potentially enthralling material, we're sure you'll agree.

Unlike Snake's admittedly excellent *Ac!d* PSP outings, *Portable Ops* is a fully fledged *MGS* adventure. Completely hands on, completely intertwined with the series' overarching storyline, and carrying the potential to eclipse every other PSP action title with one silenced round to the back of the head. For the first time in the series (apart from an option in *Subsistence*), the action will be viewed from a fully operable 3D camera – *Splinter Cell* style – which has a tremendous impact on gameplay. No longer will your field of vision be restricted by an enforced top down viewpoint, a massive change to the *MGS* mechanic that, if handled poorly, could ruin the traditionally delicate balance of stealth and action. With Kojima at the helm though, it's very unlikely the change will prove anything other than successful. It's also an excellent choice when considering the limitations of handheld videogaming – the small screen would cause any characters viewed from above to be unhelpfully small.

Even more interesting than this directorial alteration is the news that Snake will be able to recruit his own squad throughout the game – surely, the origins of FOXHOUND? *Metal Gear Solid* has traditionally been an isolated and solitary experience, so it will be interesting to see just how much the addition of squad mechanics will affect gameplay. Suffice to say that **games™** would like to see the inclusion of sniper/spotter tactics, SWAT-style assaults and classic outflanking manoeuvres. Kojima is renowned for his attention to detail when it comes to military movement and techniques, so hopes are high for truly innovative squad gameplay. Players will be able to sign up enemies and soldiers to aid them in their cause, along with storyline-specific NPCs when the game allows. Fighting alongside Ocelot? Can't see a reason not to. We live in hope.

With the promise of advanced Wi-Fi connectivity – brilliantly, you will be able to download unique squad members from Wi-Fi access points – a comprehensive online multi-player and a hugely intriguing plot, *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* should be nothing short of sublime. Providing Kojima and company can translate the series' typically complicated controls onto PSP, then this should prove the ideal partner to PS3's *Metal Gear Solid 4*. The greatest handheld story ever told? Quite possibly.

■ Ocelot? Cooler than Snake? We'd like to think so, and you can play as him in multi-player.



■ Not the stealthiest approach, granted, but it's effective all the same.

"PORTABLE OPS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO ECLIPSE EVERY OTHER PSP ACTION TITLE WITH ONE SILENCED ROUND TO THE BACK OF THE HEAD"

SNAKES ON A PLANE

A few slight graphical and control issues aside, the core two-on-two and free-for-all deathmatch games are excellent. Instead of the standard *MGS* radar, players are given a sonic pulse similar to that in *Snake Eater*, meaning that stealth is very much the order of the day, and matches will not descend into frantic firefights. Supporting up to four players via infrastructure and ad hoc, *Portable Ops'* multi-player is shaping up to be near essential.

FATAL INERTIA

KOEI AIMS FOR WIPEOUT'S CROWN

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Koei Canada
RELEASE: 17 November
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ An attractive futuristic racer in the mould of *WipEout* and *F-Zero*, featuring momentum and inertia-altering weaponry and stunning environments.

PS3 **Is anyone interested in futuristic racing any more?** Between *WipEout*, *F-Zero* and even *Extreme-G*, there are precious few avenues left for developers to explore when putting us through our hover-based paces. This hasn't stopped Koei from touting its extremely pretty looking but slightly uninspiring PS3 launch title *Fatal Inertia* of course, but the question remains – does anyone care?

As it stands, *Fatal Inertia* is a prime example of the dangers of next-generation software. Simply bigger and better looking but with little discernable difference in gameplay from a host of current-gen titles. Perhaps many potential PS3 owners will be content with this sort of visual update, but the rest of us clamour for more. Still, despite our rampant cynicism, *Fatal Inertia* is shaping up to be a perfectly pleasant racing experience, and every game should be judged on its individual merits after all.

Races take place not on tightly constructed tracks but in wide, natural environments (glaciers, dusty canyons, forests and so on) with distinct checkpoints to guide racers in the correct direction. The vehicles fly through these 'tracks', so are not bound by the traditional X and Y of the genre; all three dimensions must be taken into consideration, making for some interesting tactical opportunities. Certainly, finding the best racing line will be a very different challenge from the majority of track-based racers.

Unfortunately, that's where the innovation stops. Races are won and lost on the skilful use of weaponry, and the usual set of bombs, missiles and mines are available along with a magnetic tool which can be used to slingshot your vehicle ahead of other opponents *Micro Machines V4*-style. Unless Koei has some fascinating secrets hidden under *Fatal Inertia*'s bonnet, don't expect to be blown away by originality. It's just not in the game's ethos.



■ The high-definition visuals cannot be faulted, but the gameplay is, at this stage, quite uninspiring.

> "FATAL INERTIA IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THE DANGERS OF NEXT-GENERATION SOFTWARE"

Which brings us nicely on to vehicle customisation. Ah yes, the staple of every racer since the dawn of time (or indeed *NFS: Underground*). Players can tweak every aesthetic detail of their vehicles, from paint jobs to cockpit style; a particularly pleasant feature considering how attractive the game is visually, but to be honest it's far from breathtaking.

There's one crucial factor that may yet prove to be *Fatal Inertia*'s saviour. The PS3 controller. Koei is yet to confirm whether or not the tilt sensitivity will work with the game, but if *Fatal Inertia* is to be anything other than an also-ran, it absolutely HAS to. Then, and only then, will this be a title that gamers cannot experience on current-gen hardware, and then and only then will **games™** be interested. In the coming months, the true worth of *Fatal Inertia* will be revealed. Let's hope Koei really tries to push the envelope.



■ Racers will have to take all three dimensions into consideration when hurtling through *Fatal Inertia*'s tracks.


eMag

CALL OF DUTY 3

THIRD TIME LUCKY FOR TREYARCH?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Treyarch
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (2-24 Online)

CONCEPT

■ Step three in *Call Of Duty's* path to making the ultimate war game. Lots of killing in the countryside as you fight the battle for Normandy.

PS3 **Sitting in the Medal Room of the Honourable Artillery Company, it's difficult not to feel over-awed.** Tales of bravery and heroism adorn the walls, captured forever in each disc of polished metal and wisp of ribbon. It's a humbling place and a canny choice of location in which to show the latest build of *Call Of Duty 3*. After all, this will be the franchise's first real foray into the next gen; *COD2* did appear on 360, but failed to make full use of the power and felt compromised as a vision of what a next-gen war game could be.

Set after the D-Day landings, *COD3* will differ from its predecessor's tendency to jump from conflict to conflict, concentrating instead on the Battle of Normandy, a series of skirmishes that allowed Allied forces to clear the road to Paris. The variety of *COD2's* missions was the game's strong point, and Treyarch has compensated for the narrower focus by allowing the player to experience several different roles: US GI, British SAS, a Polish tank commander and a Canadian mechanised infantryman. Focusing on one event is integral to Treyarch's goal of creating a realistic combat experience, as is the chance to play as every nationality that fought in the battle. It shows a historical awareness lacking in other games, and that the level being showcased was the battle of Saint Lo only reinforces this idea. Saint Lo was a classic instance of British thuggery, where days of bombing to clear German forces hindered the progress of Allied tanks, resulting in loss of life. Treyarch's spokesman assured us that *COD3* wouldn't be an exercise in flag-waving, and the in-game soldiers lament the actions of their own superiors as well as the enemies'.

> "TREYARCH IS TAKING AN 'UP-CLOSE' APPROACH TO COMBAT, WHERE THE ENEMY IS RARELY MORE THAN A FEW FEET AWAY"

The bulk of the demo involved a battle through a cemetery and the houses of Saint Lo. Treyarch is taking an 'up-close' approach to combat, where the enemy is rarely more than a few feet away – the combat was punctuated by close-quarters stand-offs and hairy moments when enemies appear as if from nowhere. Toward the close of the level, our GI entered a basement and was jumped by a German soldier. As the enemy tried to wrestle our weapon away, instructions appeared on screen to tap the left and right triggers. The struggle continued until the German was overpowered, thrown to the floor and shot by another soldier. This was an example of 'Battle Action', a series of intense situations asking you to enter increasingly difficult button combos. As well as defeating enemies, the technique will be used in a number of other ways, including disarming explosives and capturing enemy vehicles.

As is becoming the hallmark of next-gen games, *COD3* has improved AI, increased scale, physics to die for, and wonderful levels of detail. The standout moment occurred in a graveyard when a bomber flew into the spire of a nearby church. Impossibly attractive flames and smoke rushed into the air as burning bodies fell from the windows. A frag grenade exploded, sending smoke gusting in all directions, and bullets created tiny swirls through the dispersing cloud. An impressive sight, although not everything was so clearly next gen. The majority of what we saw seemed familiar to war games of the recent past. Hopes remain high, but *Call Of Duty 3* may not so much be reinventing the wheel as giving it a good, hard spin.

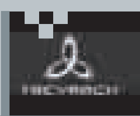
OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS

One of *Call Of Duty 2's* major failings was the mediocrity of its multi-player function, a mistake that Treyarch doesn't intend to make again. It has a whole team 100 per cent committed to it at all times, and promises that up to 24 players will be able to fight at once in a variety of traditional and unique game modes. The multi-player and the main game will also feature driveable vehicles, a first for the *Call Of Duty* franchise. Treyarch was tight-lipped as to whether the game would definitely make use of the motion-sensitive function of the Wii and PlayStation3, but did admit that it was under investigation.



■ *COD3's* attention to detail is impressive, like the pull-focus technique used for aiming.

■ The church tower explosion was the undoubted highlight of the footage we saw.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Established in 1995, Treyarch devoted much of its first five years to creating innovative and moderately successful games for PC. Bought in 2001 by Activision, it then began to focus its efforts on the console market, creating a varied portfolio of titles including sports sims, and comic book and film licences.

HISTORY

- **ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN** 2005 [Multi]
- **CALL OF DUTY 2: BIG RED ONE** 2005 [Multi]
- **MINORITY REPORT** 2002 [Multi]



Did we mention the smoke? Chances are we did, but once again… just look at the smoke.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MAKE GAMES, NOT WAR

CALL OF DUTY + REALISTIC SMOKE + NEXT-GEN THRILLS = CALL OF DUTY 3

"PLAYERS ARE THRUST ONTO AN AUTHENTIC LIVING BATTLEFIELD FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED VARIETY OF COMBAT"
ACTIVISION PRESS RELEASE



Set pieces such as the graveyard shootout will offer multiple paths and tactics to choose from.

RAID OVER THE RIVER

NIBRIS STARTS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: TBA
DEVELOPER: Nibris
RELEASE: Q2 '07
GENRE: Vertical Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A contemporary take on the vertical shooter using complex scientific theory and all DS's bells and whistles.

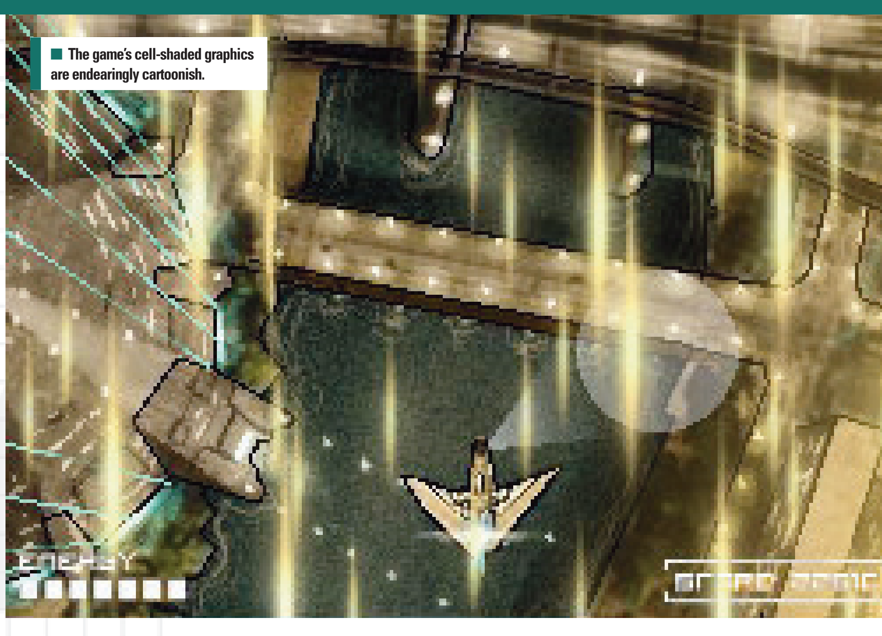
Constant scrutiny of every major game can leave you a bit jaded. It doesn't take long to get used to the core group of publishers and developers, and you quickly learn what to expect from each. Genuine surprises are a rarity in the videogame industry, but there's a growing feeling that Polish developer Nibris may have the capacity to deliver something special.

There isn't much to go on – it hasn't released a game yet – but there is a certain eccentricity of thought that sets it apart from the majority. It is the team behind *Sadness*, the forthcoming Wii game and a tribute to the silent cinema of the early 20th Century. Games are often accused of plagiarising cinema, but only the most ardent naysayer could dispute Nibris' approach as being anything other than unique. Now, as if to do a deliberate u-turn, it is tackling sci-fi with *Raid Over The River*. It isn't often that we read a press release that discusses 'Deutsch-Everett theory' and 'temporal paradigms', but then this is Nibris, and it's trying its damnedest to put an innovative spin on that hoariest of genres, the vertical shooter.

The plot concerns an ancient artefact that grants the ability to travel to alternate dimensions. You will play Carrie Collins, a fighter pilot charged with investigating other dimensions and eliminating possible threats. The game consists of six campaigns, split into several sub-missions, with the action stretching across six dimensions and 3,000 years, from ancient Greece to futuristic Japan. Each campaign will have its own vehicle, with weapons and attributes specifically suited to the terrain. Nibris promises a wide range of standard weaponry as well as vehicle-specific special attacks. Most of these will make use of the DS stylus, and screaming voice commands into the microphone will launch a select few.

The vehicles won't be limited to left and right moves – as in classic vertical shooters – but will be able to rotate, nosedive and barrel roll to avoid fire and gain better attacking positions.

With its blend of classic action, innovative controls and barking-mad plot, *Raid Over The River* has the potential to be great fun. However, as with *Sadness*, it's difficult to shake the feeling that for all Nibris' endearing quirkiness and broken English, this could end up being nothing more than generic. But then that's the thing with surprises; you never know one until it's there, right in front of you.



The game's cell-shaded graphics are endearingly cartoonish.

"THERE'S A GROWING FEELING THAT NIBRIS MAY HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DELIVER SOMETHING SPECIAL"



The stylus can be used to control the vehicle and plan the course of certain attacks.



Each time period will have its own vehicle. This one looks suspiciously like a dragon.


eMag

GODS & HEROES: ROME RISING



Combat is far more in depth than the vast majority of the genre.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GOD OF WAR

WOW + GLADIATOR × ARGONAUTS = GODS & HEROES

We don't remember seeing these in *Spartacus* – probably a good thing too.

"PLAYERS WILL EMBARK ON EPIC QUESTS TO DEFEND THE EMPIRE, PROTECT ITS INTERESTS AND PEOPLE, AND SERVE ONE OF THE ANCIENT GODS OF ROMAN MYTH"

PERPETUAL PRESS RELEASE

GODS & HEROES: ROME RISING
PC

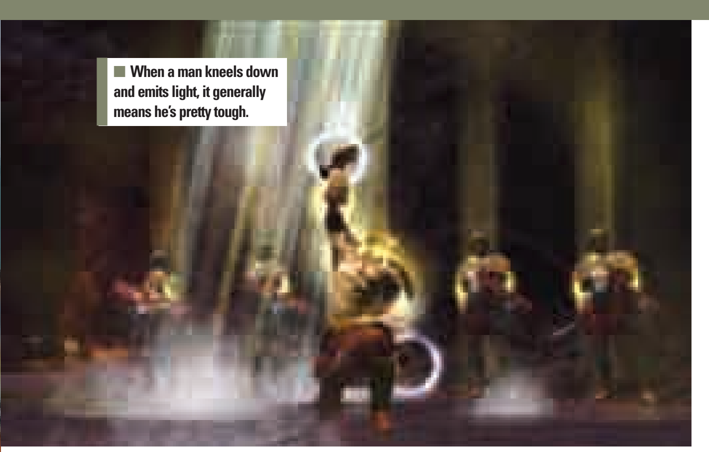


DEVELOPER PROFILE

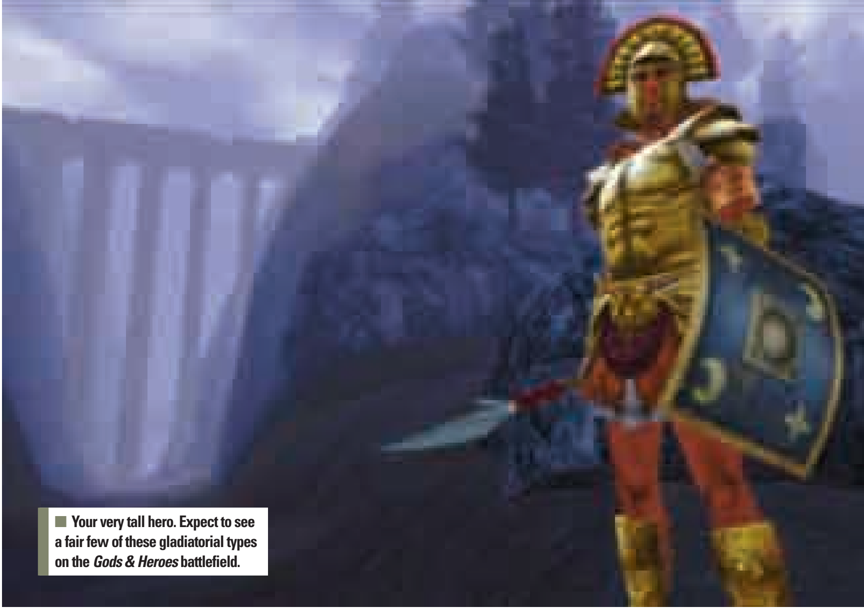
■ *Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising* is Perpetual's first project, and is being developed simultaneously with the forthcoming *Star Trek Online*. Should the two games be successful then Perpetual could become one of THE names in the future of MMO development.

HISTORY

■ GODS & HEROES: ROME RISING IS THE FIRST TITLE FROM PERPETUAL ENTERTAINMENT



■ When a man kneels down and emits light, it generally means he's pretty tough.



■ Your very tall hero. Expect to see a fair few of these gladiatorial types on the *Gods & Heroes* battlefield.

THE GREATEST CONCEPT SINCE SNAKES ON A PLANE. PERHAPS.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Perpetual Entertainment
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multi-player



CONCEPT

■ Simple as you like. A massively multi-player mishmash of mythologies featuring medusas, Roman gods and woolly mammoths among many others.

The MMORPG is a curious beast. You could be forgiven for thinking that there are only a handful in existence, given the genre's still relatively niche status in this territory. *Guild Wars, WOW, Second Life* – these are the names us Brits are familiar with, yet in Korea there are thousands of them all vying for attention in a very crowded market. By this reckoning, it's high time another contender took the big step and challenged for the title of Massively Mass Market Multi-player RPG. And *Gods & Heroes* could well be the game for the job.

With the subtitle *Rome Rising*, it comes as no huge surprise to learn that the game is set in ancient Rome, instantly setting Perpetual's title apart from the usual Tolkien-esque fare. However, this is not the ancient Rome you may remember from the *Asterix* comics or Russell Crowe movies, this is an ancient Rome filled with gorgons, hydras, and woolly mammoths. This is 'videogame' ancient Rome.

Yes, *Gods & Heroes* is still firmly entrenched in the 'fantasy' camp, so don't expect to be plotting Caesar's downfall with a fat kid from Wisconsin. Instead, players will be teaming up with others and setting about general monster-hunting and mission-completing duties. Generic maybe, but it's the intricacies within this standard MMO template that have sparked our interest. Perpetual is aiming to subtly evolve the massively multi-player landscape without disturbing its balance.

The premiere evolution comes in the form of combat. Seemingly disillusioned with the standard 'click click' melee attacks of the likes of *WOW* and *Guild Wars*, Perpetual has built the game around a deep and comprehensive close-combat engine. Based upon the discipline of Greco-Roman wrestling, and also using the same system to depict weapons-based fighting, *Gods & Heroes'* battles have far more in common with an action-adventure than they do a typical RPG. Players can grapple with their enemies, wrestle them to the ground and link myriad strikes and submissions to create a fluid and believable fight. Fine in theory; potentially troublesome in practice. Taking on a human is not a problem, but the system's intricacies are somewhat lost when combating a 30-foot dragon. We shall see.

Not content with simply redefining MMO combat, Perpetual has included a fully fledged squad system. An NPC squad, that is. So, as well as travelling the game's environments with real-life avatars, players will also be able to recruit AI-controlled team-mates for battle. Picture the scene: ten player-controlled characters each with six team members. That's like a small army charging into the fray. Hopefully the promise of full player-versus-player combat extends to these large-scale battles. Who needs *The Lord Of The Rings* online if you can recreate Helm's Deep in *Gods & Heroes*?

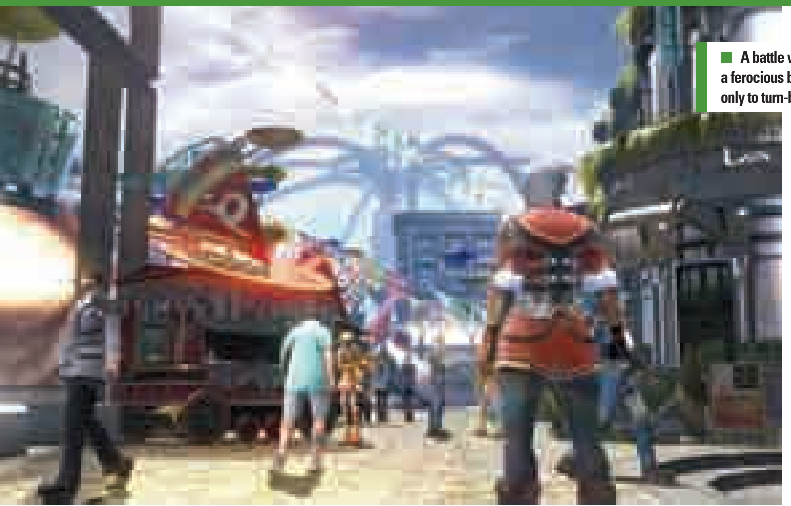
> "DON'T EXPECT TO BE PLOTTING CAESAR'S DOWNFALL WITH A FAT KID FROM WISCONSIN"

Rome Rising has a great deal going in its favour. Its strong visual treatment, its fantastical high-concept blend of the military and the mythological, the deep and fulfilling combat engine… Nevertheless, the prevalent issue with all MMOs is likely to rear its ugly head once more. These games are defined by their communities; without players, they are nothing more than expensive virtual holidays, and if *Gods & Heroes* is to genuinely succeed, it will need to breach both the Western and vital Korean markets. Will Korea take to such a European-themed title? *Gods & Heroes'* future depends on it.

MYTHOLOGICAL PROPORTIONS

Sometimes, **games**™ enjoys historical accuracy. Minute details in war games, real leaders in *Civilization*… it all adds to the experience. Sometimes, though, we like the idea of Rome filled with dragons and mammoths, with Medusa setting up shop in the main square and a minotaur roaming the very straight streets. *Gods & Heroes* is most definitely the latter – it's a mishmash of history, mythology and culture, and therefore pretty unique. With a thousand missions promised, countless creatures and even player-versus-player combat, who knows just what you may come up against on your travels. Centaur versus hydra? Sounds like our kind of game.

ENCHANTED ARMS





A battle with a Golem – a ferocious being, susceptible only to turn-based strategy.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SQUARE ROOTS

FINAL FANTASY X + FINAL FANTASY XII + XBOX 360 = ENCHANTED ARMS

"EMBARK ON AN EPIC RPG ADVENTURE AND ESCAPE TO A FANTASY WORLD FILLED WITH BEAUTIFUL CINEMATIC-QUALITY GRAPHICS"
UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

Here's Atsuma. He looks cool here, but we can assure you he's bloody irritating.

ENCHANTED ARMS

XBOX 360



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ You might have guessed from its straight-talking name that From Software wasn't always about making things for people to enjoy – it started out as a company that produced business applications. Things changed, and it soon became a leading Japanese game developer responsible for the successful *Armored Core* series.

HISTORY

- ARMORED CORE: NEXUS 2006 [PS2]
- TENCHU: DARK SECRET 2006 [DS]
- FRAME GRIDE 1999 [DREAMCAST]



FROM SOFTWARE AND UBISOFT FANTASISE ABOUT NEXT-GEN RPGS



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: From Software
RELEASE: September (Japan: Out Now, US: August)
GENRE: Role-Playing Game
PLAYERS: 1 (2 Online)

CONCEPT

■ It's an RPG in the vein of *Final Fantasy* but with pretty, next-gen visuals. That's about all you need to know about this.

As we've been repeatedly reminded, this is the first Japanese RPG on Xbox 360. For many, the term 'Japanese RPG' is a good enough seal of approval, but that's morons for you. The truth is *Enchanted Arms* just isn't amounting to much at all – frustrating when it should be straightforward, and laughable when it should be interesting.

The plot's hideously generic, with you playing Atsuma, a nonchalant, gifted student of Enchant University, who becomes the world's only hope when the dormant but potentially very dangerous Golems awake from a mystical slumber. Naturally, Atsuma is saddled with a group of friends who could have come straight out of an episode of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*. Makoto is an incredibly annoying champion of camp, and Toya, the most memorable, is Enchant's best student.

The game is teaming with awful clichés strolling around campus like flies round a poop scoop bin. No effort has been put into making these peripheral players the least bit interesting; instead they make you wish for a punch button. Hardly surprising from a game that has a hero seemingly made up of reject create-your-own *SoulCalibur III* characters, but irritating nonetheless.

What *Enchanted Arms* does have on its side though, is the potential to get better. We're making our early judgements based on a fraction of the game – if we did that all the time we doubt we'd ever give an RPG more than a three. From Software has stated that there's over 50 hours of gameplay here, so there's plenty of room for characters to stop being annoying and start being intriguing. Likewise with the gameplay. We've really only explored the campus and we can't say that we've felt immersed in any of it – the interaction with other characters is amateur at best, the dialogue is some of the worst we've heard for a long time and the setting is crammed with run-of-the-mill glamour. There's also an absurd inclination on behalf of the characters to turn all '*Carry On*' and start speaking with over-the-top in-your-endo. But, like we say, thus far we've only courted the surface of the game, and we're not so pigheaded as to believe that it couldn't possibly get better over the course of two full days.

Given the length of the game, we also don't feel it would be fair to comment too fiercely on the battle system just yet. At the moment, it's a tedious turn-based affair with only the fact that you can change the order in which your three party members attack making it seem even remotely distinctive. We're confident, though, that the acquisition of new spells and attacks will mean greater depth. Or at least we hope that it will.

The most disappointing aspect is arguably going to be the game's biggest draw: its visuals. A game that so freely apes the style of the *Final Fantasy* series should look nothing short of stunning, and while these screens don't do much to dispute this, the game when running is marred with off-putting glitches and extremely poor lip-synching. The dreadful, garish design of the characters is also a real tragedy, as it detracts from the technically crisp graphics – it's a real missed opportunity, and by the looks of things, the rest of game might be as well.

■ The graphics are impressive, but that means little when the character design is this gaudy.



■ Toya is the scholar of the group, which obviously makes him not as good as the one who doesn't try that hard.

"THE ACQUISITION OF NEW SPELLS AND ATTACKS SHOULD MEAN GREATER DEPTH"

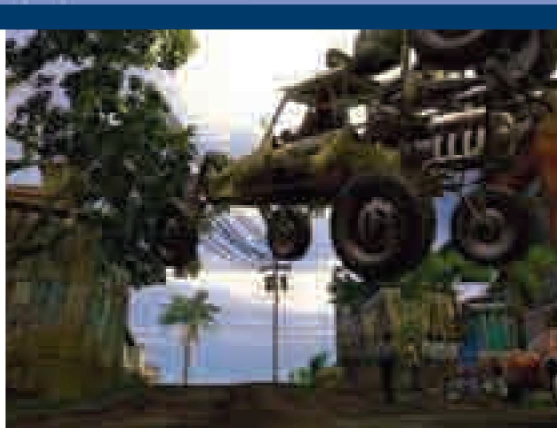
CALL TO ARMS

Such is the way of the world, we can't test the Online mode on preview code. Instead, we have to relay information Ubisoft has given us: *Enchanted Arms'* Online mode will enable you to take on others in straight versus battles. Naturally, you can take along the strongest characters from your main game for the turn-based brawl. How well you do in the strategic fisticuffs will determine how high you're ranked. Sorry, that's all we know. The words 'tagged' and 'on' spring to mind.

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES



This hairy chap's name is Matias Nelson, and not Hulk Hogan as we originally thought.



"THE HUGE RANGE OF WEAPONS AND VEHICLES LEAVE LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES FOR ATTACK"

POLITICAL INTRIGUE, NEXT-GENERATION STYLE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: TBA
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios
RELEASE: TBA '07
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 2 (TBA Online)

CONCEPT

Enter a country torn apart by war, and squeeze every last cent out of it, but remember to watch your back.

PS3 **Hugo Chavez has been notching up his fair share of column inches recently.** The Venezuelan president's socialist leanings and footloose attitude to human rights has won him enemies far and wide – the US government, pressure groups, the Venezuelan people and military. With so many parties gunning for him, you'd imagine he'd have little time for the world of videogames, but you'd be wrong.

Chavez has taken a break from rigging elections to speak out against and subsequently ban *Mercenaries 2: World In Flames* Pandemic's sequel to its PS2 hit. Set in a fictional Venezuela, where an oil crisis has turned the country into a volatile war zone, Chavez has branded the game a tool of the American government, laying the foundations for an imminent invasion. "It sends a message to Americans," claims lawmaker Gabriela Ramirez. "You have a danger next door and action must be taken. It's a justification for an imperialist aggression." Pandemic has of course denied any such political motivation, but behind closed doors the firm must be rubbing its hands with glee. You can't buy that kind of publicity.

This could be the single most interesting thing about *World In Flames* as it fits rather snugly into what's fast becoming the standard template for a next-gen game: take one idea, add an open world, some advanced physics, multiply everything by two and develop for several years. It's still technically impressive, but the practice is now so prevalent that it has softened the emotional gut-punch that such ambition and wizardry is supposed to pack.

Pandemic has claimed that the overall aim with *World In Flames* was to make sure that every question beginning with 'Can I?' can be answered with a resounding 'Yes!' As a result, pretty much anything you see can be used, acquired or decimated, and the enormous range of weapons and vehicles leave limitless possibilities for attack. So, firing a grappling hook into the side of a helicopter, shimmying up the rope and taking control is a real possibility, as is putting a hole in the side of an oil tanker, letting the liquid spill out and flicking your lit cigarette into the puddle.

The huge map is scattered with towns and people for you to explore or destroy, and you'll be able to enhance this freedom with the ability to recruit other mercenaries to form a private military company. Whether this will make use of PlayStation3's online capabilities has yet to be decided, but a two-player co-op mode has been promised. If you can still find it in yourself to be excited by the formula, *Mercenaries 2* has the potential to take up indecent amounts of your free time – unless you live in Venezuela.



The grappling hook allows you to climb up to high objects such as helicopters.


eMag

YAKUZA



"That man looks hurt. Could someone please call 999. Oh God, what's the number for 999 in Japan?"

THE JAPANESE HIT GOES ALL HOLLYWOOD

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Amusement Vision
RELEASE: Q3 '06 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Take control of a reformed Japanese gangster as he talks at length with other Japanese gangsters before smashing their heads in. Oh, and Luke Skywalker's in it too.

Previews are generally intended to provide information and viewpoint on games about which very little is known. Having played the final version of a title from beginning to end a year before would normally preclude it from this section of the magazine, but due to its enormous success in Japan, *Yakuza*, originally released as *Ryu Ga Gotoku* and never intended for a Western release, is finally making the jump to Europe with barely a pixel changed from its original incarnation.

Hype does tend to travel, and many will have imported the game after its Japanese release, but Sega is justifying the relaunch with the introduction of a new voice track (see Now, Hear This). In truth, it's difficult to see why the game hasn't arrived sooner; *Yakuza* is the kind of sprawling gangster epic that the British chug down like so much lukewarm tea. It may be focused on the Japanese underworld, but that's a virtual guarantee of martial arts and samurai swords – yet more plus points.

The game is scripted by Japanese novelist Seishu Hase, and this is reflected in the large amount of time *Yakuza* allows for advancing the plot. You play as Kiryu Kazuma, a former darling of the Japanese underworld who has just been released from a ten-year stretch for murder. Kiryu is hoping to stick to the straight and narrow, but a mysterious girl called Haruka, vast amounts of missing money, and a menagerie of colourful gangsters have other ideas. To go into any more detail would be to ruin what Sega clearly feels is a large part of the fun. The story is filled with incident, characters, cross and double-cross, and for every ten minutes spent engaging with the game there is the equivalent in cut-scenes for you to placidly absorb. Think *Shenmue* with more of an appetite for glorious violence.

Needless to say, this stop-start gameplay won't be to everyone's tastes, and the open world the game takes place in is a lot more restrictive than that of *GTA*. Your forays into the Tokyo streets are largely restricted to purchasing items and travelling short distances to clearly defined locations, oddly reminiscent of the inferior *Final Fight: Streetwise*. You can interact with people on the street to gain information about events in the game, but outside of the cut-scenes, your inter-personal experiences will be largely taken up by combat. The levels are strewn with items that can be used as weapons, and there is also a simple and effective combo-based fighting system. There are basic commands of kick, punch, grab, block and dodge, different sequences of which can be used to form devastating attacks. Good performance increases your Heat meter, which unlocks context-sensitive finishing moves.

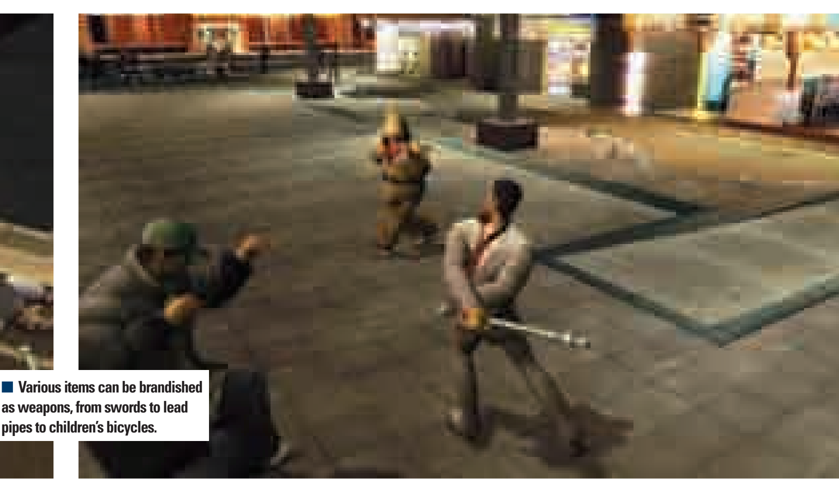
Yakuza is a highly polished product. The gaudy, rain-flecked neon of Tokyo makes use of every iota of PlayStation2's graphical capability, the plot is relatively well thought out and the voice cast, barring a few stilted moments, do a fine job of bringing the characters to life. The stumbling block for *Yakuza*, particularly in the early stages, is that its curious mix of long protracted cut-scenes and furious combat can seem a little rigid and repetitive. With so much emphasis on story, we hope the plot manages to engage where the action sometimes fails.

"THINK SHENMUE WITH MORE OF AN APPETITIE FOR GLORIOUS VIOLENCE"

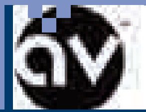
NOW, HEAR THIS

While undoubtedly a good game, it seems strange that *Yakuza* is blessed with such a star line-up. Luke Skywalker himself, Mark Hamill, plays Majima, a violent but honourable gang boss; Michael Madsen is Shimano, a similarly violent but less honourable Yakuza chief; Eliza Dushku lends voice to Yumi, Kiryu's childhood friend; and Rachel Leigh Cook takes the role of bar hostess Reina. The game's original voicing was in Japanese, and occasionally the dialogue is broken up to allow for the difference in the characters' lip movements. We strongly suspect that the game would have worked just as well with English subtitles, thereby retaining a greater air of authenticity.





Various items can be brandished as weapons, from swords to lead pipes to children's bicycles.

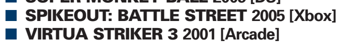


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Amusement Vision used to go by the name of Sega AM4, a former research arm of the Japanese publishing giant, and was responsible for several arcade classics including 1994's *Daytona USA*. The developer became a second-party developer in 2000, concentrating mainly on Japanese titles before being reabsorbed by Sega in 2004.

HISTORY

- **SUPER MONKEY BALL** 2005 [DS]
- **SPIKEOUT: BATTLE STREET** 2005 [Xbox]
- **VIRTUA STRIKER 3** 2001 [Arcade]





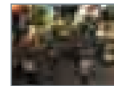


■ The combat is satisfyingly brutal and easy to master, a welcome respite from the long cut-scenes.



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD!



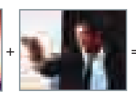
RYU GA GOTOKU

\+



MARK HAMILL

\+



MICHAEL MADSEN

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YAKUZA



"GAMERS WILL EXPERIENCE A DEEP, CHARACTER-DRIVEN STORYLINE LIKE NOTHING THEY HAVE ENCOUNTERED BEFORE"

SCOTT A STEINBERG, SEGA

■ The plot is triggered by the fatal shooting of a powerful crime boss.

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

EA'S PREMIER FRANCHISE IS LEAVING THE CITY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube, Wii, PC, PSP, DS, GBA
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ Focusing on the hitherto untapped world of canyon racing, *NFS Carbon* offers more high-speed, EA focus-grouped thrills.

PS3 **Along with the infamous *FIFA Street*, EA's *Need For Speed* franchise is much maligned within the industry.** Many cite it as the pinnacle of all that is wrong with modern videogaming; cynically developed, marketed and sold to the so-called 'casual' market, and as such coming out on top at Christmas year after year. Yet, those who chastise EA's street racer tend to forget one thing – this is a genuinely decent series of racing games. It's no *Burnout*, but is still competent and well above average.

So it's with our cynicism specs removed that we take this first look at the inevitable sequel to last year's *Most Wanted*. Subtitled '*Carbon*', this latest iteration marks a change in direction for the series, veering away from the tightly packed city streets and focusing on canyon racing – the most underground of car clubs. Races take place on the winding roads overlooking Carbon Canyon, and one slip of the steering wheel or misjudged corner can spell disaster. The game's producer Larry La Pierre is also very excited about *Carbon*'s potential, "We pride ourselves on our ability to reinvent the franchise and continually uncover new and exciting trends in car culture. Canyon racing is a real test of a driver's skill and we think it provides a fantastic gameplay opportunity".

> "THE KEY PHRASE IS CAR CULTURE – TEST DRIVE AND GRAN TURISMO HAVE AUTOMOTIVE FETISHISM DOWN WHILE NEED FOR SPEED IS THE GAME FOR BOY RACERS"

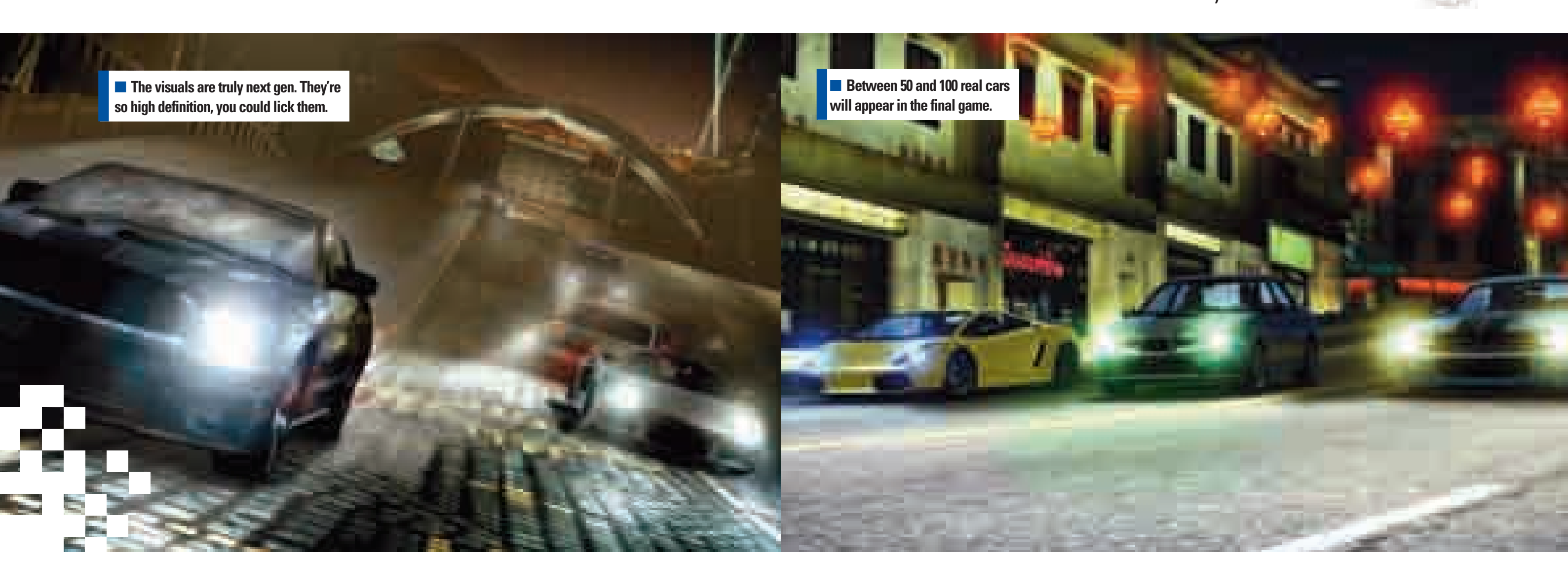
And that's the key phrase: car culture. While *Burnout* may have the handle on pure speed, and *Test Drive* and *Gran Turismo* have automotive fetishism down to a fine art, *Need For Speed* is the game for boy racers, for the subsection of the community that spends every last penny of its earnings on its vehicles. Blame *The Fast And The Furious* if you must, but what was once a niche pastime is now very much mainstream, and, as such, *Need For Speed* is big business. The culture aspect of *Carbon* has spawned a storyline: there's a war going on in the city – most likely LA as there's a Carbon Canyon in Chino, California – so your good self, and your 'crew' must battle for control of the turf by partaking in dangerous high-speed street races. Sounds like an odd war to us.

During this 'war', the police take offence to all the street racing, and force proceedings out to the aforementioned Carbon Canyon, and this is where things start to get interesting. The crux of *Carbon*'s gameplay comes in the form of your gang, or 'crew'. It will be possible to actually recruit car enthusiasts into your troop for the purpose of territorial domination – pick the best team, align yourself with a good garage and take to the streets and winding roads to fend off the competition – it's pure one-upmanship, bravado and vehicular machismo EA style, and we wouldn't want it any other way. Nor would we want a new EA game without a tacked on gimmick. So, up steps 'Autosculpt' technology, the new word in car modding. Exactly what it entails is still not known – EA is keeping its cards unusually close to its chest, but all signs point to complete creative control over every single aspect of your car – from chassis to decal.

A surprising amount has changed since *Need For Speed* last sat pretty at the top of the charts – and this year's version is looking the best yet, and by some distance. See you at Christmas.

KING OF THE ROAD

Territory can be captured after defeating an opposition gang's top driver in a two-part game of cat and mouse. Starting at the top of a mountain, it's a straight race to the bottom, twice. First time through, the opponent will have a head start on you. Overtake him or her and it's an instant win, get too far behind and it's all over. It's okay if you lose, as skilful driving will earn you points for use in the second race. The tables are then turned, and your nemesis chases you, deducting points from the total the closer he or she comes to overtaking. It's a unique and potentially controversial system, but it's good to see EA exploring different avenues.



■ The visuals are truly next gen. They're so high definition, you could lick them.

■ Between 50 and 100 real cars will appear in the final game.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Before EA swooped to buy Black Box, the Vancouver-based studio was responsible for *Sega Soccer Slam* and *NHL Hitz 2002*. Now focusing its energy on *Need For Speed*, Black Box has been involved with the franchise since *Hot Pursuit 2* back in 2002.

HISTORY

- **NEED FOR SPEED HOT PURSUIT 2** 2002 [PS2]
- **SEGA SOCCER SLAM** 2002 [Multi]
- **NHL HITZ 20-02** 2001 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GRAND CANYON

NFS MOST WANTED + CANYONS + MOUNTAINS = NFS CARBON

"CANYON RACING IS A REAL TEST OF A DRIVER'S SKILL AND WE THINK IT PROVIDES A FANTASTIC GAMEPLAY OPPORTUNITY TO LEAN INTO"
LARRY LA PIERRE, ELECTRONIC ARTS

■ One slip, one misjudged corner and it's all over. No *Burnout*-style impact time here. No sir.

ELEBITS

RUN, TINY CREATURES! RUN FROM THE MIGHT OF MY ZAPPY GUN

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC 2007
GENRE: Action-Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ *Pikmin* meets *Ape Escape* – it's all about hunting down and catching little Elebit creatures in a fully interactive environment.

In a world where the preoccupying worry of ever-diminishing oil and coal supplies is never far from mind, *Elebits'* solution to energy management seems enviable, if not entirely ethically sound. In a world without carbon costs and giant, sulphur-spewing industrial filth-towers, the Elebits themselves – tiny little strange Pikmin-esque creatures, of which there are three specific types – are the source of all the world's energy. Although they apparently live in harmony with humans, your task as the player is to chase them down, flush them out and zap them with the Nintendo Wii controller. We're not exactly sure why they must be captured in such a way, but that seems less than harmonious to us.

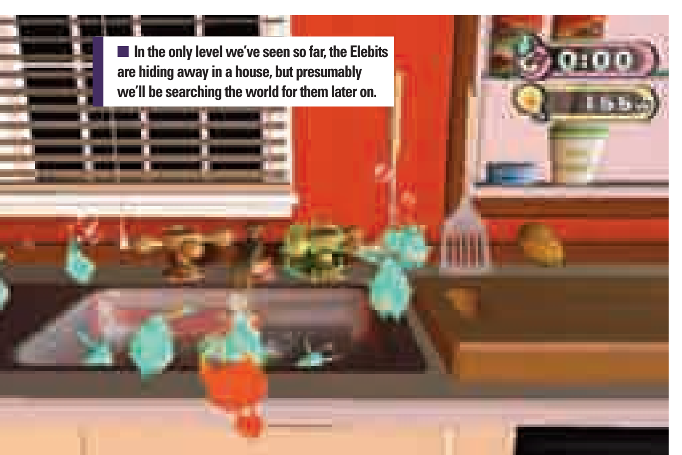
Elebits is Konami's first Wii title, and it looks to take advantage of the new freedom of design offered by the system by giving players a uniquely malleable world with which to play. Equipped with something approaching the gravity gun from *Half-Life 2*, the player must overturn everything from tables to cookie jars, and look in drawers, under rocks and in hard-to-reach places for hiding Elebits. Once found, they can be zapped with the controller in order to capture them, and as their powers grow you'll be afforded a range of additional abilities, the nature of which is not yet clear (although we assume that the gravity gun will be powered up, allowing you to reach new areas of levels or search around more awkward obstacles). Once uncovered, zapping the creatures is purely a matter of quick reflexes – they will often run to other hiding places as fast as their little legs can carry them.



■ Funny little things, aren't they? We can't tell if he's asleep or just stuck.

"ELEBITS GIVES YOU THE FREEDOM TO MANIPULATE THE ENVIRONMENT HOWEVER YOU LIKE, WHICH IS REFRESHING"

Elebits does give you the freedom to manipulate the environment however you like, which is refreshing and addictive in practice. Nintendo Wii copes admirably with the physics of picking things up and throwing them about, and you can either sneak up on hidden Elebit clusters or bang things about to scare them out into the open by taking advantage of your surroundings. At present the game isn't showing much of the sophistication that such freedom of movement and interaction might make possible, but it's a fun and endearing premise (if you don't have a problem with chasing down scared, fleeing little creatures with a futuristic capturing device). The novelty of being able to physically push, pull and throw objects in a game world effortlessly evokes a smile, and the game's presentation is suitably cheery and colourful, if hardly next generation in terms of graphical sophistication. The emphasis here, though, is on the physical fun of playing the game, and the fact that it plays so addictively even at this early stage says much for the viability of its hide-and-sneak concept.



■ In the only level we've seen so far, the Elebits are hiding away in a house, but presumably we'll be searching the world for them later on.




eMag

MAELSTROM

The Ascension is the most high-tech faction, reflected in its machines, which can change shape much like a Transformer.

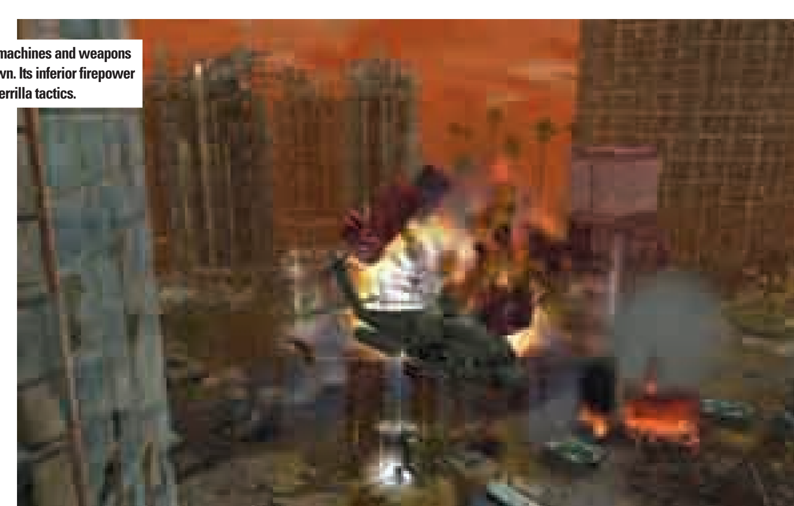
"MAELSTROM IS AN ACTION-STRATEGY TITLE WHERE HOLLYWOOD SCI-FI MEETS GROUNDBREAKING RTS GAMEPLAY"
CODEMASTERS PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
THE CREATION OF CHAOS

BUGGER ALL WATER + MISGUIDED ALIENS + LANDSCAPE GARDENING = MAELSTROM



The Remnant uses machines and weapons recognisable as our own. Its inferior firepower is made up for with guerrilla tactics.



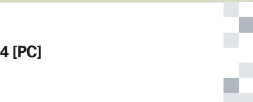


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Russian developer KD-Vision pioneered the earth-moving approach to real-time strategy with the acclaimed *Perimeter* in 2004. Those ideas have now reached fruition in *Maelstrom*, and could prove influential to the direction of future strategy titles.

HISTORY

■ **PERIMETER** 2004 [PC]



MOVING HEAVEN AND EARTH…

Despite months of industry-fuelled clamour over new consoles, the next generation has heralded much more than the arrival of new technology. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo's varying approaches to the next generation have forced gamers to form their own view of what it should be. We're looking at games differently now – under harsher scrutiny – and making judgements on what works, what doesn't, and, most importantly, what needs changing.

There's an air of stagnancy around games at the moment, the boundaries of most genres remaining unmoved for years. Nintendo is directly tackling this with the Wii, and Microsoft and Sony's recent forays into motion-sensitivity suggest that this isn't entirely lost on them either, but the influence of the next generation has spread far beyond the boundaries of these three companies. With so much product being released and an audience growing steadily tired of the form it takes, developers across all platforms are trying to find original ideas – something that will allow the audience to feel that they're not playing another generic title. *Prey's* anti-gravity level design was enough to make it one of the most exciting games to emerge in a long while, and with so many quality RTS titles looming large we're hoping that KD-Vision's *Maelstrom* will be the one to offer that tantalising alternative.

Set 50 years into the future, *Maelstrom* depicts an Earth recoiling from a meteor strike that has caused a global climate crisis. Water is now a precious commodity and the focus of a bitter dispute between three factions: The Ascension, a technologically advanced and authoritarian group of humans; The Remnant, human rebels trying to sabotage The Ascension's plans to reshape the planet; and the Hai-Genti, a race of semi-aquatic aliens with no respect for human life, but a desperate need for water – we couldn't work out why a race of amphibious aliens would desire a planet that has just lost most of its water, but we're sure there's a very good reason.

In most respects, *Maelstrom* is your typical real-time strategy game. You'll be able to play as any one of the three factions, each of which has different strengths to master. The Ascension has the most advanced technology, though it's more expensive to produce; The Remnant uses fairly antiquated machines, but is skilled in sabotage and close combat; while the Hai-Genti relies purely on organic weapons. You'll also be able to zoom into a third-person perspective and guide a specific unit should the moment require it, and a six-player Online mode will be present to extend the game's lifespan.

Where *Maelstrom* looks to offer something new is in the environments. Terraforming will play a huge role in the game, allowing you to shape the landscape for your own tactical gain. The Hai-Genti require water to fight, and so will use bombs to make craters before ordering their ships to fill them, creating a suitable environment for combat. In turn, the human factions can freeze the water, thereby slowing the enemy and rendering the Hai-Genti's environment useless. The implications of this environmental control will be far reaching, including the ability to induce tornadoes and control the wind, and presents a huge number of new variables to consider when preparing for each battle. It may not be much, but at least it's original. A unique idea that *Company Of Heroes*, *Supreme Commander* and a whole host of forthcoming RTS games won't be able to offer. When every game seems so good-looking and highly polished, sometimes that 'one idea' is all you need.



"TERRAFORMING WILL PLAY A HUGE ROLE IN THE GAME, ALLOWING YOU TO SHAPE THE LANDSCAPE FOR YOUR OWN TACTICAL GAIN"

■ *Maelstrom* promises spectacular battles with the option to control individual units in third-person.

PAPERBACK WRITER

To better shape the universe of *Maelstrom*, KD-Vision employed the literary talents of James Swallow, a veteran British author of numerous original books and tie-in novels. The only writer in Britain to have worked on *Star Trek* and the man behind the novelisation of *The Butterfly Effect*, Swallow's epic narrative spans four campaigns, first playing as The Remnant, followed by The Ascension, then the Hai-Genti before the loose ends are firmly tied in the secretive final chapter. We're not sure about the man's credentials, but Swallow should still provide *Maelstrom* with a modicum of extra depth.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: KD-Vision
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (2-6 Online)

CONCEPT

■ An RTS that gives you unparalleled tactical control, letting you shape the battlefield to fit in with your grand plan.

STAR TREK: LEGACY



■ The size of each ship has been carefully followed, thus the Borg's cube is a lot larger than anything else.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THAT'S ILLOGICAL, CAPTAIN

STAR TREK + CREW – DODGY GAMES = STAR TREK: LEGACY

"AN EPIC GAME OF STARFLEET COMBAT SPANNING THE ENTIRE STAR TREK UNIVERSE"

BETHESDA PRESS RELEASE

■ As each faction has more than one enemy, battles can easily become three-way stand-offs.

STAR TREK: LEGACY

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Dr Ian Lane Davis, an expert in artificial intelligence, founded Mad Doc Software in 1999. The firm is committed to the consistent improvement of in-game AI, achieving considerable success and receiving awards with such titles as *Empire Earth II* and *Dungeon Siege: Legends Of Aranna*.

HISTORY

- EMPIRE EARTH II 2005 [PC]
- JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON 2002 [PC]
- STAR TREK ARMADA II 2001 [PC]

A DECENT STAR TREK GAME. THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Bethesda
DEVELOPER: Mad Doc Software
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Strategy-Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ After years of substandard tie-ins, someone has finally had another go at restoring credibility to *Star Trek* games. Good luck.

Previews seldom feel redundant before they've even been written, but when the subject is a *Star Trek* game it changes the playing field somewhat. There are those out there – Trekkies, to give them their proper name – who will simply read the title and rush straight out to pre-order a copy; the rest will take one look at the title and turn straight to the next page. Either way, this preview stays unread.

Star Trek is one of those properties that inspires such fanatical devotion in people, that those who don't love it end up hating it. Think *Star Wars*, think *Harry Potter*, think *Lord Of The Rings*. On top of its Marmite-esque qualities there are also years and years of *Star Trek* videogames that tread the line between average and awful. Anyone tolerant of the cult of Trek is likely to have been pushed into hatred by exposure to such substandard tie-ins. All things considered, Mad Doc Software has a mountain to climb in the credibility stakes.

Where *Star Trek: Legacy* seems to get it right is in its focus. Previous games have placed the crew at the centre of the action – great for fans, largely redundant to everyone else – whereas *Legacy* puts you in control of the spaceships and nothing else. Characters from the various series will appear in the game, but not as the focus of the plot. No mugging from Spock, no shiny-headed Picard, and no amorous alien/human relations with Kirk.

The single-player game will see you take control of Federation starships, boldly going and destroying the fleet of your various enemies. As you complete missions, the storyline progresses through the four epochs of the television show – starting with *Enterprise*, through the original series, on to *The Next Generation*, then *Deep Space Nine* and finishing with *Voyager*. You will control up to four ships at a time, with newer, more advanced models becoming available as time goes on. Command points are awarded for the successful completion of objectives, and can be used to upgrade your ships in a variety of ways, be it hull strength, shields, sensors, engines or weapons.

The focus of *Legacy* is very much on combat. You will be able to command and individually control every ship in your fleet during battle, with Mad Doc placing emphasis on simplicity of gameplay while sacrificing none of the scale. The playing area will be fully three-dimensional, and successful tactics will rely on your ability to move ships into the best positions for attack. Other games seldom take into account the relative weight and size of the individual spacecraft, but in *Legacy* it is everything. Rather than frenetic, the combat will be slower, more measured, and graceful.

Whether this approach gives the *Star Trek* faithful what they're after is doubtful. Fans would almost certainly like to take control of their favourite characters, rendered in glorious next-gen graphics. The time for that game will no doubt come, but *Legacy* is likely to appeal to a larger audience than anything too entrenched in the mythology of the show. Really big, shiny things blowing each other to kingdom come – in gaming terms it's the great leveller, and if you squint your eyes just right, you could almost pretend it wasn't even *Star Trek*.



■ Multi-player mode will allow you to control vessels from four different factions.



■ You will be able to switch power between shields, weapons and other parts of your ship during battle.

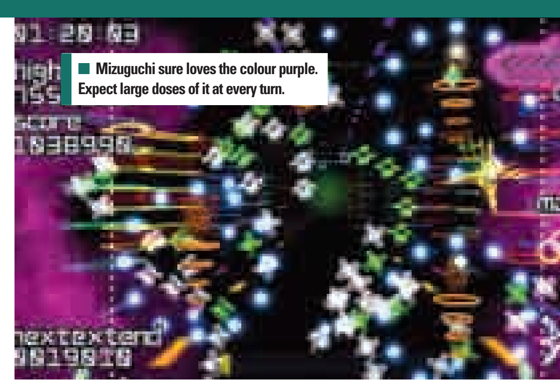
"EMPHASIS IS ON SIMPLICITY OF GAMEPLAY WHILE SACRIFICING NONE OF THE SCALE"

RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

If playing as the Federation wasn't variety enough, then *Legacy's* Multi-player mode will go some way to redressing the balance. There's a choice of four factions – Federation, Klingon, Romulan and Borg – each with unique ships, bringing the total number of vehicles to 60. There will be Deathmatch and Co-operative modes, while Mad Doc is also working on an additional tug-of-war option. There will be full Xbox Live support with matchmaking, stat-tracking and player rankings.

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA





Mizuguchi sure loves the colour purple. Expect large doses of it at every turn.

"EXPERTS WILL CARVE OUT ELECTRONICA MASTERPIECES AS THEY SHATTER THEIR OWN HIGH SCORES"

MIZUGUCHI RETURNS WITH MORE HANDHELD FIREWORKS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Buena Vista Games
DEVELOPER: Q Entertainment
RELEASE: September
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

An abstract combination of shoot-'em-up, lightshow and interactive album, *Every Extend Extra* is pure Mizuguchi.

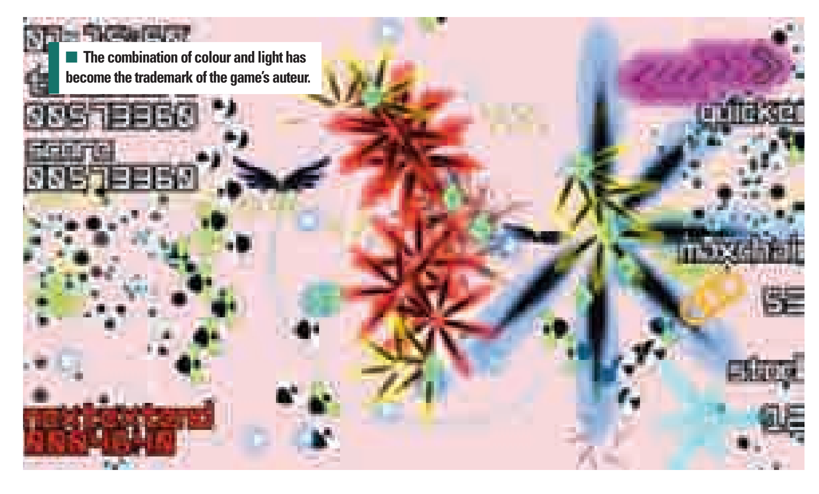
Tetsuya Mizuguchi is a true pioneer of the videogame form. Not interested in photo-realism, cinematics or Hollywood voiceover talent, the man behind the incredible *Rez* and hopelessly addictive *Lumines* concerns himself with creating games that evoke an emotive response in the player. Both *Rez* and *Lumines* are far more than a sum of their parts; the combination of light, music and sheer playability form a reaction that other games simply cannot. With *Every Extend Extra*, the man is launching another mixed-media release of serotonin directly into our bloodstream. We wouldn't want it any other way.

Based on the freeware *Every Extend*, this game – affectionately, and confusingly, known as *E3* – is a shoot-'em-up at heart. You control a small ship travelling through a tunnel of vectors and light and must avoid the myriad shapes and bullets heading your way, all the while charging a pulse attack which when unleashed will destroy anything in its immediate proximity. If any objects are then caught in the blast radius, they'll explode too, and so on. It's all about skilfully avoiding as much as possible and then finding the optimum time for release, thereby causing the largest chain reaction. It's simple in concept, but devilishly difficult in practice.

Aside from the obvious influences of Mizuguchi's own back catalogue, the game that is closest in spirit to *E3* is Bizarre Creations' delectable *Geometry Wars*. The music, the visuals and the obscenely frantic rush that that game delivers are definitely in evidence here. What *E3* does to expand on this aesthetic, though, is to intrinsically link every action on screen with the soundtrack. As in *Rez*. As in *Lumines*. You can see the theme here, no?

Yes, as in the past, *Every Extend Extra* is all about accessing a transient mental state. You subconsciously create your own soundtrack while you play the game. Novices will play to a cacophony of cymbals, kick drum and orchestral stabs, while experts will be carving out electronica masterpieces as they shatter their own high scores. It's potentially ideal PSP fodder – taking advantage of the superior graphical and sound capabilities while only relying on a minimal control system.

At this 80-per-cent-complete stage, a noticeable amount of slowdown is still evident in *Every Extend Extra*, something we're certain will be eradicated before release. If not, then it could prove game breaking, as keeping in time to the music is crucial to the experience as a whole. Providing Mizuguchi and co can iron out this most hampering of technicalities, then there's no reason why *Every Extend Extra* can't prove another essential Q Entertainment product.



The combination of colour and light has become the trademark of the game's auteur.


eMag

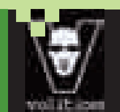
SAINT'S ROW



Snatch is a sub-game that tasks you with killing pimps and taking their hos. Lovely stuff.

Do you admire the heat effects, or gag at the burning corpse? Ah, the beauty of *Saint's Row*.

"THE ONLY GAME IN ITS GENRE THAT OFFERS CHARACTER-CUSTOMISATION OPTIONS AND A MULTI-PLAYER EXPERIENCE"
THQ PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

It was only when it was acquired by THQ that Volition Inc started to come into its own. Previously, Volition had developed the space simulation *FreeSpace*, but since THQ it has been involved with a number of diverse and successful projects, most notably the *Red Faction* series.

HISTORY

- **THE PUNISHER 2005 [Multi]**
- **SUMMONER 2001 [Multi]**
- **RED FACTION 2001 [Multi]**





You will be able to line your pockets by staging accidents and collecting the insurance.



With a gang war in full swing, *Saint's Row* is the most violent open-world game yet seen.

DID SOMEBODY SAY COPYCAT?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Volition
RELEASE: September
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-12 Online)

CONCEPT

An open-world game, set in the criminal underworld of a large city where you drive cars and complete missions and… oh sod it, it's just like *Grand Theft Auto*.

It's become journalistic shorthand to call any open-world game a *GTA* rip-off, a Pavlovian response to mimicry of even the tiniest detail of Rockstar's masterwork. The sanctity of the franchise is so absolute that the mere suggestion of a developer piggybacking its way to success is treated with the utmost disdain. In a way it's right, but enough time has passed since the arrival of *GTAIII* to mark out any such comments as lazy criticism, and harmful to the positive development of an emerging genre.

Initially, all FPS games would have been dismissed as *Wolfenstein* clones, and beat-'em-ups would struggle to escape from the shadow of *Street Fighter*. Now, both are fully formed genres, the early efforts that emulated their founding fathers, paving the way for future classics. Genres are perfected by failures as well as successes, and the only way of knowing if the *GTA* format has legs beyond the limits of Rockstar's franchise is to allow others to try their luck. *Saint's Row* has been criticised for plagiarism, and while it's impossible to deny that the games are remarkably similar in many ways, Volition's effort still looks great, plays well, and is bringing something new to the party in the form of a Multi-player mode.

While we waited for the game to start we were placed in a lobby that took the form of a warehouse littered with crates and barrels, and was best used to warm up for the carnage ahead. Of the modes we tried, the most ordinary was an all-against-all deathmatch in a construction site ringed by seats. A variety of obstacles and cover littered the playing area, with several weapons hidden in the stands and a small electric car available to whoever reached it first. The combat is more forgiving than that of *GTA*, but it's far from perfect and this mode's emphasis on killing made it the most difficult to enjoy. More fun was to be had with a mode that tasked you with collecting and dropping off gold medallions. With the playing area switched to a section of the city, there were more opportunities to use the level design to your advantage, and while it was difficult to understand what we were supposed to do, there was a better sense of being in control of the game's outcome. The most rewarding mode was Protect The Pimp: players were split into two teams and dropped at opposite ends of the same building. One team had to escort the pimp to the exit, while the other had to gun him down before they did. With two possible exits and only four players per team, it proved tough to cover both well enough to stop the pimp from escaping, but that provided a tactical element that was missing from the other modes on offer.

> "THE ONLY WAY OF KNOWING IF THE GTA FORMAT HAS LEGS IS TO ALLOW OTHERS TO TRY THEIR LUCK"

The *GTA* games are not without their weaknesses, and *Saint's Row*'s next-gen platform could add depth, variety and graphical sheen to a winning formula. Rockstar will no doubt chime in with its own next-gen effort, but not for at least a year. Until then, we have to get our dose of open-world mayhem from somewhere, and *Saint's Row* is not a bad solution.

LIKE A MILLION DOLLARS

Before the multi-player session began, we were able to take advantage of one of *Saint's Row*'s unique features: the character creator. Where other open-world games simply drop you into the same character each time you play, *Saint's Row* allows you to manipulate your appearance and name. Similar in scale to EA's character customisation, the option might not make a difference to the game itself, but is symptomatic of Volition's commitment to an unparalleled level of freedom. If you group together the absence of loading times, the freedom to choose missions, and a completely unlocked map from the word go, *Saint's Row*'s possible advantages over *GTA* become increasingly apparent.

INFERNAL

NOW SUBTITLE FREE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC (Next-Gen TBC)
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: PlayLogic
DEVELOPER: Metropolis
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Third-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Agents of heaven and hell fight for the Earth in this grimy and atmospheric third-person action shooter.

The recently renamed *Infernal* made the journey all the way from Poland to see us this month, unhampered by its clunky former title, *Diabolique: Licence To Sin* (a very sensible change made by new publishers PlayLogic). Stylistically a mix between *Half-Life 2*'s bleak industrialism and the over-the-shoulder outdoor exploration of *Resident Evil 4*, *Infernal*, as it has now been re-branded, is looking very promising indeed, mixing primarily action-centred third-person shooting with the occasional puzzle and an inspired, if not entirely original, devilish premise. On the PC version with which we got acquainted, it was looking excellent – we're assured that *Infernal* will be appearing on at least one of the next-gen consoles, but as yet PlayLogic is not able to disclose which. Given the game's fast-paced and reactive play style, it would probably find itself just as much at home on either Xbox or PlayStation3 as it does on PC.

Infernal's eyebrow-raising plot forms the basis for much of the action, drawing equally from supernatural and more conventional urban-gang-warfare inspiration. Ryan Lennox, the main character, is a former agent of heaven whose violent temperament and affinity for destruction got him chucked out and sent to work for hell instead. The conflict is between the respective agents: taking advantage of a rare absence on the part of God to convert the entire world, heaven's army is destroying the agents of hell, and Lennox – seemingly without much help from the other agents of hell – must stop them. He is helped by one or two double agents from heaven's side who don't want to see the balance of good and evil upset, but for most of the game Lennox appears to be very much on his own.

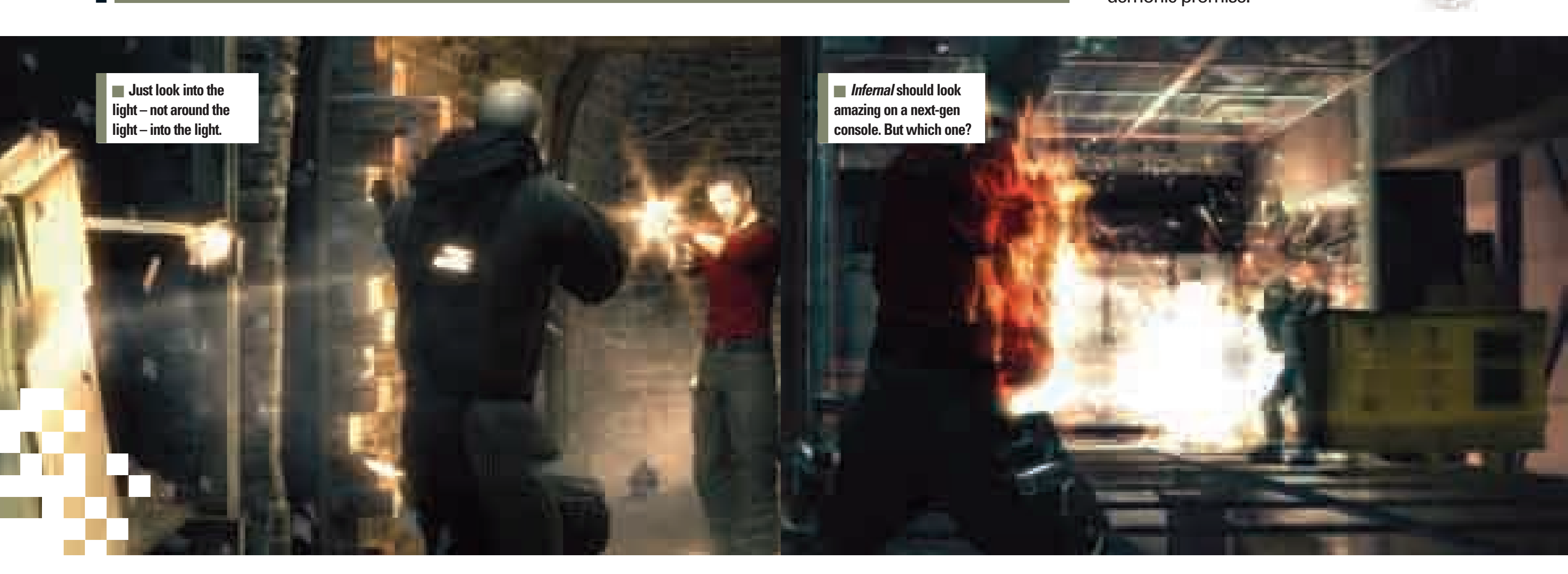
"THE DEVIL ABILITIES ALSO ADD A VERY SLIGHTLY PREY-ESQUE DIMENSION TO THE GAME'S LEVELS ON OCCASION"

It's not so much the plot that's particularly interesting as it is the premise – as an agent of hell, Lennox has a variety of demonic powers at his disposal, although much of the fighting is still done with good old reliable guns and, occasionally, fists. Absorbing the soul energy of fallen enemies restores health and builds Lennox's power making for a pretty visual effect, and that power can be released to devastating effect with special attacks and powers. The Devil abilities also add a very slightly *Prey*-esque dimension to the game's levels on occasion. The teleport ability, for instance, which sends Lennox to three different locations one after the other, requires a good deal of spatial awareness to get to grips with, and the ability to telekinetically move objects around when Lennox becomes more powerful opens up a whole range of opportunities. The powers add an extra layer of consideration to what might otherwise be a fairly unremarkable third-person shooting game – having to figure out how to teleport behind certain enemies in order to shoot the oxygen tanks on their backs, for example, is a refreshing change from just shooting heaven's agents in the head.

Infernal is an atmospheric and quite inventive game, and though its influences are often a little too apparent (*Psi-Ops* particularly), it still manages to appear fresh. What we've played so far was greatly enjoyable and we share PlayLogic's high hopes for the title. Come the end of the year, we'll see whether *Infernal* lives up to its demonic promise.

DIFFERENT STROKES

***Infernal*'s five chapters have a lot of variety in terms of setting and gameplay – inside an airplane, gunfire would cause the whole thing to explode, limiting Lennox to hand-to-hand combat, and in one church setting his devil powers were unavailable because he was on consecrated ground. The driving level raised eyebrows as it smacks of arbitrary addition, and though the game has a way to go until release, the controls seemed a bit skittish. We're wary of another *Tomb Raider: Legends* motorbike-section-style fiasco. Otherwise, the variations in gameplay fit well with the setting and help to keep the game feeling fresh, as does the gradual acquisition of Lennox's powers.**



Just look into the light – not around the light – into the light.

Infernal should look amazing on a next-gen console. But which one?



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in 1992, Metropolis Software is based in Warsaw, Poland and specialises in action games. Of its previous titles, *Odium* and *Archangel* have been the most interesting, merging a distinctive and gritty artistic style with accomplished premise.

HISTORY

- **SOLDIER ELITE** 2004 [PC]
- **ARCHANGEL** 2002 [PC]
- **SOLDIER ELITE** 1999 [PC]



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DEVIL MONEY

PSI-OPS + RESI 4'S VIEWPOINT + SOUL REAVER'S SOUL ABSORPTION = INFERNAL

"UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE, UNBELIEVABLE GRAPHICS AND A GREAT LEVEL OF CHOICE COMBINED WITH SIMPLE, INTUITIVE PROGRESSION"

PLAYLOGIC PRESS RELEASE



An inventive game, we can't wait to see how *Infernal* turns out when it's released toward the end of the year.

MERCURY MELTDOWN

A CHANGE OF PACE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Ignition Banbury
RELEASE: September
GENRE: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

A sequel to *Archer Maclean's Mercury* that aims for a more accessible feel than its predecessor.

Released alongside the handheld itself back in 2005, *Archer Maclean's Mercury* remains one of PSP's few exciting platform-exclusive titles – it was even graced with a Japanese release, a rare achievement indeed for a Western game. That it should consequently inspire a sequel comes as no surprise but, with *Mercury Meltdown*, Ignition (formerly Awesome Studios) seems to be forcing the series in a direction that fans aren't entirely happy with. Where the original's stylised visuals and general shininess suited Sony's new machine's veneer of professional cool down to the ground, *Mercury Meltdown* is a more colourful, more accessible take on the concept. Thankfully, judging by our hands-on time with the game, *Mercury's* difficulty level and gameplay seem not to have changed as much.

As can be seen from the screenshots, the game's look is altogether more cartoony. The black border around the ball has caused particular unrest among *Mercury's* hardcore following, but there is the option to turn it back to the classical blob style as well as a range of skins to make the mercury's look fit your taste. There's the same selection of *Monkey Ball*-esque challenges, although the levels have a little more depth this time around in the form of hidden areas and collectables, which are entirely supplementary to the universal goal of making it to the end without losing any mercury, and provide incentive for repeated play-throughs. The difficulty works using a 'saw' structure, with easier challenges following the nail-bitingly impossible ones, and should a particular level stump you it's still possible to progress by building up success on the other levels within the set in order to unlock the next selection.


If you've played *Mercury* you'll know exactly what these pictures are about. If you haven't, it's extremely self-explanatory.

The most significant change to the gameplay focus is the addition of myriad multi-player functions. Any level in the game can be played competitively with two players. Power ups provide the traditional annoyances for your opponent or boosts to your own abilities that make any good multi-player game a truly competitive experience, and there's also a selection of mini-games with more specific mercury-based goals. The mini-games, although enjoyable, are notably diversions from the main multi-player as opposed to a focus in themselves – they provide action-based respite from the frustrations of traditional *Mercury* puzzling.

Multi-player features are sure to give a boost to *Mercury's* popularity as a puzzle game, but Ignition has risked annoying its fan base in changing the style of the game. It certainly feels different from its predecessor, but whether or not different means better will certainly be a point of contention upon release.

> "MERCURY MELTDOWN IS A MORE COLOURFUL, MORE ACCESSIBLE TAKE ON THE CONCEPT"



This is a blob-racing mini-game, one of several that come bundled with the main puzzles.


eMag

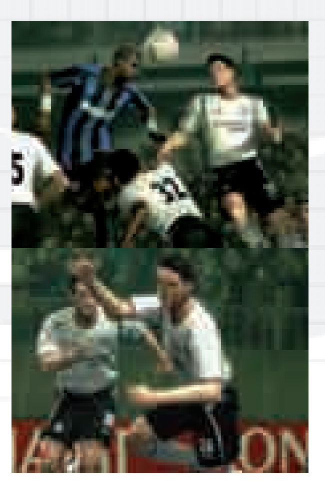
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2007

IT'S COMING HOME

Format: DS, PC, 360, PS3, PS2, PSP
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: KCET
Genre: Sports
Players: TBA



Everybody's favourite football game is finally set to make its next-generation debut this winter with high-resolution screenshots of Brazilian meathead Adriano whetting fans' appetites. The early PS2 code has already arrived in the **games™** office, and is suspiciously similar to *Winning Eleven 10*, with faster players, faultless passing and improved shooting, but it's the 360 version everyone is hankering after. Even just a visual overhaul will suffice, but with Seabass often mentioning the number of animations left out of the PS2 version due to technical limitations, the future is looking very bright indeed.

RELEASE: Q4 '06

GUN SHOWDOWN

WAY OUT WEST

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft
Genre: Action
Players: 1-2



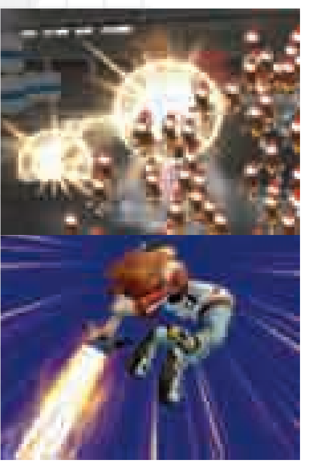
Five new missions and a Wi-Fi multi-player justify the PlayStation Portable reworking of Activision's misfiring Western epic *Gun*. Aside from that, you can expect the same brutal but repetitive gunplay, drawn-out horseracing sections, excellent atmosphere and top-notch voice acting that made the original an entertaining if ultimately flawed addition to the sandbox genre. Visually, the game has lost a layer of sheen in its transition to the portable PlayStation, and the usual control concerns are prevalent, but it's good to see developers and publishers releasing extra content with their handheld ports. Texas-Hold-'Em poker also makes a much welcomed return – perfect PSP fodder.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

APE ESCAPE: MILLION MONKEYS

SO. MANY. MONKEYS.

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: TBA



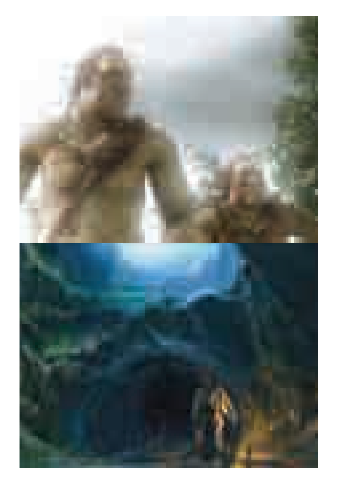
First there was *Dead Rising*, Capcom's superb looking zombie-fest which prides itself on the swarms of undead that drawn the screen. Now we have the simian equivalent. The *Million Monkeys* subtitle is no lie – you've literally never seen this many of the siren-hatted mischief-makers. As opposed to just running around snagging apes in a net, this is full-scale war, with vehicles, heavy weaponry and even monkey mechs. Excellent. Sony is also promising hectic four-player battles, a 40-stage Survival mode and customisable weaponry, so there should be a greater level of depth that belies the simplistic premise. *Ape Escape: Million Monkeys* is certainly one to keep your eyes on.

RELEASE: TBA

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE WHITE COUNCIL

OH, NOT ANOTHER EFFING ELF

Format: PS3, Xbox 360, PC (TBC)
Origin: US
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: TBA



Electronic Art's 'Project Gray' open-role-playing game project was this month revealed to be *The Lord Of The Rings: The White Council*, a fanatically Tolkien-faithful depiction of the fantasy land Middle-earth about 80 years before the events of the novels. The team has drawn from *LOTR* backup fiction and Tolkien history to portray an 'accurate' version of the world, and though the game is still choice-based and open-world, there is a very strong storyline to follow, which gives the game necessary structure. It's tempting to bandy the words 'Oblivion' and 'hopeful' around, but this title might just be something extraordinary.

RELEASE: 2007



DELAYED – Sonic Wild Fire [Wii] Spring
Initially thought to be arriving this year, Sonic's revolutionary debut will now not see the light of day until spring.

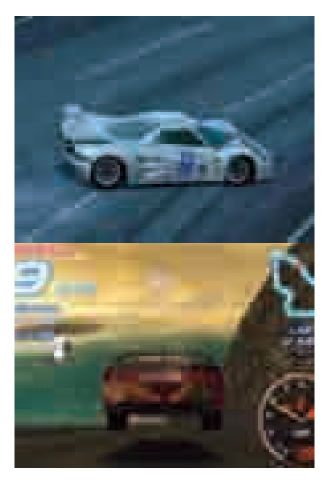


DELAYED – Call Of Juarez [PC] August
The Western-themed shooter has slipped once again, and is now pencilled in for a release later on this month.

RIDGE RACER 2

A SECOND SLICE OF DRIFT

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Namco
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-8



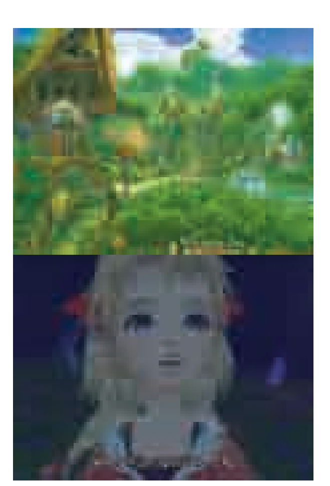
Sony's announcement that the sublime PSP *Ridge Racer* would receive a sequel was definitely music to our ears. You should expect more of the same; certainly the screens look identical to those of the original but with more tracks, new cars and, with any luck, more of the aural travesties that make up the series' 'unique' soundtrack. Sony is touting "three times as much play" as the original, so you can rev up for a racing epic akin to *Ridge Racer's* Xbox 360 debut, and with the intriguing promise of all-new modes as well as features – which are to be announced soon – this could be the finest PlayStation Portable racer yet to appear. More information as soon as we get it.

RELEASE: Q4 '06

TRUSTY BELL: CHOPIN'S DREAM

A CLASSICAL RPG

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Namco/Bandai
Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: 1



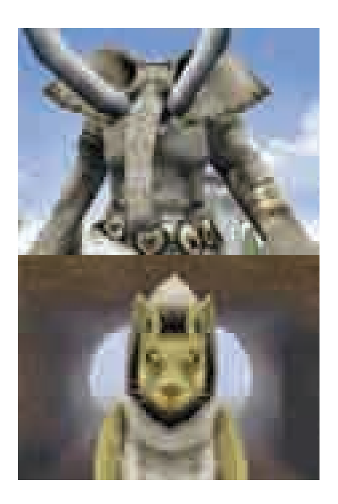
Now, this really is a peculiar one. Furthering Xbox 360's desperate assault on Japanese gamers is *Trusty Bell: Chopin's Dream*, a classical-music-themed role-playing game from the team behind the *Tales* series. The pedigree is clear for all to see – the game is looking particularly sumptuous, mixing traditional RPG locales such as dense forests and magnificent castles with a 19th Century-England style. Quite how the classical music element will fit into the game is not yet out in the opem, but we predict that you will be using a piano for spellcasting, and other such ingenious ideas. It's very Disney, very pretty, and may just turn out to be very special indeed.

RELEASE: Q4 '06

DEEP LABYRINTH

JUMP MAGIC JUMP

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: 1



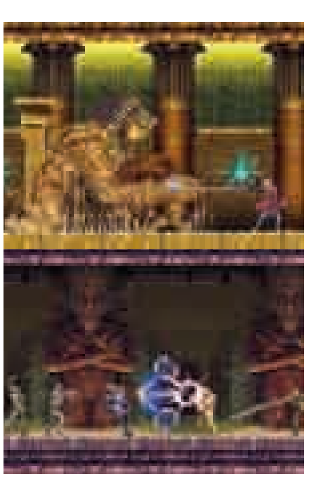
California-based Atlus is touting *Deep Labyrinth* as the first three-dimensional RPG for Nintendo DS, and we're not about to disagree. Viewed from the first-person perspective, Atlus' latest offering has some serious pedigree behind it. Designed by none other than the legendary Masato Katou – the genius behind *Chrono Trigger* – *Deep Labyrinth* sees players on a typical dungeon crawl. The twist comes in the form of control, which actually isn't terribly unusual for a Nintendo DS game really. And yes, you will be using the touch screen to swing your sword and raise your shield, a novel twist on the typically stifling RPG genre. *Deep Labyrinth* is brimming over with potential.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

BELMONT'S BACK… OR IS HE?

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform
Players: 1



To answer the question posed above: no. The latest *Castlevania* game will give players the choice of two vampire hunters, Charlotte Orlean, a young girl blessed with magical abilities, and the brilliantly named Jonathan Morris – who we are promised has nothing to do with animals. Set during the Second World War, *Portrait Of Ruin* sees a return to the familiar platforming-cum-exploration that has made the series so popular over the years. Players are able to switch between the two protagonists at will for puzzle-solving duties. The previous *Castlevania* title on Nintendo DS was excellent, and so hopes are fairly high for another excellent entry to this most beloved of series.

RELEASE: Q4 '06


MISSION 1
STAGE 2



Shop till they drop **Alien Storm, SMS [Sega] 1990**



Choppers are now fully functional.

Miami doesn't skimp on hotels.



WHEN ROCKSTAR PROMOTES A NEW GTA GAME, IT DOES IT WITH STYLE. GAMES™ FLEW TO SOUTH BEACH, MIAMI TO TAKE A WORLD EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT VICE CITY'S SECOND COMING, AND CAME BACK WITH A TAN AND A GREAT BIG SMILE. HERE'S WHY…


The skylines are even more spectacular.

New and Improved

We try to refrain from using previews as an excuse to simply list features, but this is *GTA*, and we know as much as anyone else that the people just want the knowledge. So here we go, a list of everything we saw in our brief time with *Vice City Stories*. Make of it what you will.

Binoculars that can be used at any time, a large Ferris wheel that you can ride (and hopefully snipe from), a new rocket launcher, improved physics, prettier skylines, far more dynamic lighting, jet skis, a huge volume of boats, a sea plane, time-contextual NPC behaviour (party-goers at night, bums at 5am etc), an image of Phil Cassidy in the loading screen and Lance Vance in an ugly red t-shirt. Phew.

Grand Theft Auto. Three words that mean more in this industry than any other. Three words that have shifted the cultural landscape so much that it's almost impossible to remember what life was like without them. No Jack Thompson. No *Driv3r*. No *Saint's Row*. And more importantly, probably no Rockstar. Without *GTA*, the company that has gone on to become THE force in digital entertainment would most likely no longer exist – DMA design would probably be sucked up into some conglomerate parent company never to be heard of again. But, with three current-generation episodes of the world's most popular videogame franchise under its belt, Rockstar is back, fresh from Liberty City and with world domination still very much in its sights. *Grand Theft Auto* is going back to the beach.

IT'S NOT EVERY day that **games™** is taken to South Beach, Miami. It's not every day that **games™** dines next to Enrique Iglesias and rubs shoulders with Mickey Rourke. But then, it's not every day that Rockstar creates a new *GTA*. Better than anyone else on this earth, the publishing giant knows how big *GTA* is, and will simply spare no expense. With a year spent drinking Hot Coffee in the company of the US courts and a certain Jack Thompson, more negative press than Cristiano Ronaldo and only the distinctly understated *Table Tennis* to show for it, Rockstar had to bounce back with something big. It's sometimes easy to forget this one salient fact amid the hype, furore and damning press coverage, so we quote Rockstar's New York rep, "Rockstar Games' promise is to deliver that absolute cutting edge in digital entertainment – we make the games we want to play". So, while certain sections of the media are still whingeing about *Manhunt* and panicking about *Bully*, Rockstar has quietly gone back to doing what it does best. And how. *Vice City Stories* has never been the best kept of secrets, and after Tony Cipriani's misadventures in Liberty reminded us just what Rockstar is capable of, hopes were high, but even we did not expect to be soaring over a deep red neon sunset in a sea chopper with Lance Vance for company.

YES, VANCE IS back, once again voiced by *Miami Vice* cult legend Philip Michael Thomas (the only confirmed voice talent at this stage – admirably Rockstar does not like to sell its games on a pre-publicised cast list), but it's his brother Vic who was in control of the helicopter that fine Vice City evening. Once again, Rockstar has decided to mould a *GTA* game around an African-American protagonist, something which too much of the videogame industry is afraid of, and once again he's shaping up as a fascinating *GTA* lead. An ex-marine who is posted in Vice for work, he hooks up with his nefarious younger brother to earn some extra cash on the side. It's a simple premise and all that Rockstar is willing to reveal thus far, but you can rest assured that the entire story is going to revolve around that most designer of narcotics, cocaine.

THE INFAMOUS YEYO is the lynchpin of everything that happens in Vice City, and understandably so. Miami would not be the city it is today without it, and that does not mean one needs to powder one's nose to appreciate the distinctly decadent pleasures of Will Smith's 'second home'. No, cocaine was the economic engine behind Miami's surge into prosperity during the Eighties. As Billy Corben, helmer of new Miami-drug-doc Cocaine Cowboys puts it, "Miami was a city on the verge of social and economic ruin when this [cocaine] came along". *Vice City Stories* is going to place players directly in this dramatic period of change. Set two years prior to Tommy Vercetti's summer holiday in 1984, this is



You want this game, don't you?

Water plays a crucial role in Vice City.

Cast of thousands

Ever since *Vice City* introduced Ray Liotta as lead Tommy Vercetti, *GTA*'s cast lists have read like a who's who of Hollywood talent. Samuel L Jackson, James Woods, Burt Reynolds… it shows just how much the videogame world has changed. Can you imagine these guys getting on board with a PSOne project ten years ago? Well, only if their name was Bruce Willis and the game was *Apocalypse*.

With *Vice City Stories*, the only confirmed name is Philip Michael Thomas aka Lance Vance in *Vice City* and Ricardo Tubbs in Miami Vice. We love Philip Michael Thomas. We also expect that *Vice City Stories* will be littered with triple-A talent and cameos aplenty – perhaps even Michael Mann as a sun-drenched movie director? Who knows…

Vice pre-mafia, where the criminals outweighed the police, the city's Federal Reserve bank had a $6 billion dollar cash surplus (more than all of the other Federal Reserve banks in the country *combined*), and where kilo upon kilo of coke hit the shore with every crash of a passing wave.

THE CITY ITSELF is, unsurprisingly, extremely familiar. Our lengthy flyover in the aforementioned Sea Chopper (yes, if you hadn't worked it out, *Vice City Stories* features full aeronautical freedom) was time enough to spot Diaz's mansion, the mall and that little circle bit of road near the Malibu club. However, it was not the landmarks, but the draw distance that really caught the eye. While *Liberty City Stories* was a celebrated technical achievement, Vice City's PSP debut shows just what a talented team can do with an extra year's experience. *Vice City Stories* looks superior to its PS2 cousin in every conceivable way – those gorgeous Miami skylines have never looked better. Even the character models are sharper. Pop up is minimal (although still very apparent), the lighting wonderfully melodramatic and, of course, the music truly spectacular.

"VICE CITY'S PSP DEBUT SHOWS JUST WHAT A TALENTED TEAM CAN DO WITH AN EXTRA YEAR"

WHILE NO SONGS have yet been confirmed, for the same reason that Rockstar won't divulge the cast, some of the supposed 'placeholder' tunes mixed rather too well with the radio banter to be simply cast aside. Vice City was always the most evocative of *GTA*'s locations (only Los Santos ever really came close, for our money), and the music was and is an integral part of what made the game so memorable. Back then, it was Mister Mister and Cutting Crew. Here, it's Frankie Goes To Hollywood and Depeche Mode. It would seem that Rockstar may have taken a few liberties with timing (we noticed a few bars of the very much post-1984 *Blue Monday* creeping in at one point), but when the soundtrack has this much potential, technicalities should not get in the way of art.

GTA'S SOUNDTRACKS AND radio chitchat have been integral to the series' unparalleled success this generation. *GTAIII*'s bare bones licensed music (and inspired *Scarface* soundtrack lift) laid the groundwork, but it was the original *Vice City* that really showed the power of the sandbox world when set to music. The effect of those stunning sunsets or sporadic thunderstorms was amplified tenfold when accompanied by a musical treasure from the Eighties. Other games have followed suit, with considerable success. *Driver: Parallel Lines'* soundtrack helped add to the game's Seventies vibe superbly, and even the execrable *True Crime: New York*'s inclusion of Sinatra raised a few smiles – until the game glitched you into the Hudson River, of course. It just goes to show the influence of *GTA* on modern videogaming – while it may seem you can't switch on a console these days without confronting some attempt at an open world or a car-jack button, there are far less intrusive ways that Rockstar's finest has permeated even a game like *Prey* – check out the excellent jukebox selection in the opening bar scene.

SO, WHILE GTA'S influence seemingly knows no bounds, there's still no escaping one fact. No one does *GTA* better than *GTA*. It's ▷

"GTA IS A SORT OF VIDEOGAME BIG BANG – IT GOT IT RIGHT FIRST TIME"



Classic GTA imagery.

Jet skis make their GTA debut.

Biking through South Beach – lovely.

almost as if the game appeared as some sort of scientific anomaly, a videogaming Big Bang that somehow got everything right first time. DMA's original *GTA* mixed genuinely intelligent humour, complete freedom and ultra-violence so spectacularly well that it seemed 'easy'. It has since been proven that it was no fluke; the hundreds of carbon copies that all languish behind *GTA* when it comes to atmosphere and interest is testament to that. And yet Rockstar continues to amaze. *Vice City Stories* is actually pushing the *GTA* series forward in many ways. While it may not have the scope of *San Andreas*, it is a far more focused experience, specifically when it comes to the missions.

THE KEY HERE is variety. Rockstar Leeds is adamant that missions are no longer point-to-point A-to-B drives. In the small smattering of tasks **games™** was privy to, Vic Vance had to jump from a jet ski (yes, there are jet skis in *Vice City Stories*) onto a PCJ, leap from a car onto a tanker and off again, and at one point go from airborne chopper combat to a ground-based assault. If the four missions we played are an indication of the overall quality of the game's narrative thread, then *Vice City Stories* will be the tightest *GTA* yet. We loved *San Andreas* for all of its ambition, scope and genius, but some of those missions were truly painful. *Vice City Stories* looks set to rectify this, and then some.

HOWEVER, EVEN IF the missions weren't up to scratch, there's still a hundred hours of criminal misdemeanour to be had in 1984's Vice City. The aforementioned jet skis will while away many an hour – handling completely differently to any of the boats of the series' past, and showing off the game's new water effects brilliantly. Rockstar believes *Vice's* water to be the hidden gameplay element, the city's underlying personality, and as such it now moves and feels like real H2O – with waves, currents and spray. It's a game that just keeps on giving.

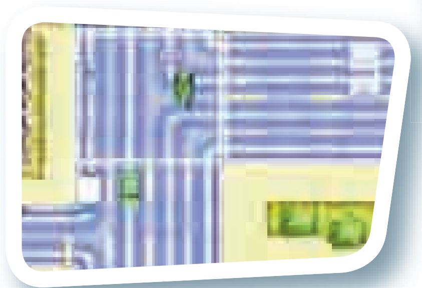
Of course, while *Vice City Stories* is an undeniably mammoth achievement on PSP, and a truly superb game in its own right, it can still be considered a step back for the series in light of *San Andreas*. Obviously, achieving something with the scope of *GTA's* third PS2 outing on a handheld is a task even the team at Rockstar Leeds can surely not manage (although we still wouldn't put it past them), so we must wait for next year's *GTA IV* to see just where the series will go, and despite our attempts to trick the Rockstar reps into telling us it was to be set in Bournemouth, we're certain that only a very few select people know *anything*.

IF WE WERE to hazard a guess – a Latino lead, a huge choice of destinations and some sort of online integration, but speculating about the future of *GTA* is about as fruitful a pastime as playing *Kabuki Warriors*. The hype machine is already starting to click into gear, and *Vice City Stories* is a timely reminder of just how excited we should all be about *GTA's* next-gen debut. Words cannot describe just how big an event it will be – there's absolutely no way Rockstar can afford to disappoint. And with the appearance of Vice *City Stories*, there's no reason to think that it will.

ONCE AGAIN, ROCKSTAR has shown just how important *GTA* is to its portfolio, and has clearly spent half the budget of a small European nation on raising the bar for PSP gaming once again. A legion of gamers were blown away by what *Liberty City Stories* achieved, but *Vice City* takes it to the next level. No restraints, no restrictions, this is full 3D *Grand Theft Auto*. Go anywhere on land, sea or air, with visuals to die for and the finest missions yet. And if that doesn't get you excited, we worry about your health. Maybe you should spend some time in the sun.

A History of GTA

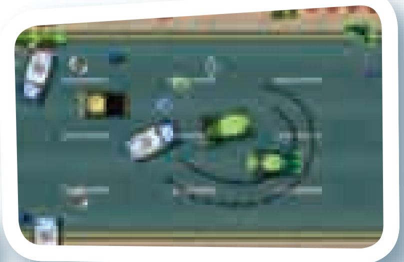
Grand Theft Auto
RELEASE: 1998
When Rockstar North, in its previous incarnation as DMA Design, released the first screenshots of this top-down 2D crime simulator, the world laughed. In the age of the polygon, DMA held strong and created one of the most compelling videogames ever released, shunning convention and censorship, and ending up with one of the most vital pieces of media ever crafted. A true gem.



Grand Theft Auto: London 1969
RELEASE: 1999
This add-on pack was a clear indication of how Rockstar intended to mould the *GTA* series. Set in 1969's swinging London, with a soundtrack to match, this collection of missions was ultimately too easy due to weak policing, but excellent nonetheless. Who can forget the *Austin Powers*-style Union Jack car? It initially required *GTA* to run, but is now available as a standalone package.



Grand Theft Auto 2
RELEASE: 1999
Hit and miss best describes *GTA*'s first true sequel. The PSOne effort lacked the working trains of the PC version and had serious frame-rate issues, but the core freedom slowed by the multiple gang mechanic won over many plaudits. Ultimately, its ambition was quashed by technological limitations, but *GTA* was still a class apart from its numerous pretenders.



Grand Theft Auto III
RELEASE: 2001
The game that changed the world forever. Still revered by many as the series' high point, although we'd disagree, *Grand Theft Auto*'s move into 3D was such an incredible achievement that it took many months for its impact to truly sink in. The sheer freedom and vibrancy of Liberty City was so impressive that it seemed almost too good to be true.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
RELEASE: 2002
Just a year later came *Vice City*, the moment when the *GTA* series really hit its stride. The radio stations became integral to establishing the superb Eighties setting, and the use of Ray Liotta as lead Tommy Vercetti lent the game a cinematic quality it was previously lacking. *Vice City* brought flying (controllable flying, that is), real estate and motorbikes to 3D *GTA*. We're eternally grateful.



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
RELEASE 2004
We thought it was going to be big, but no one could have imagined the unfathomable scope of *San Andreas*. An entire state as a playground, with riffs on LA, San Fran and Vegas to visit, miles upon miles of countryside to roam and even its own mountain. *San Andreas* also gave us complete control over central character CJ – his diet, fitness and clothing were in our hands. A seminal piece of work



Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
RELEASE: 2005
Another incredible achievement, fitting an enhanced version of Liberty City into a handheld console and keeping it smooth, good looking and extremely playable. While in retrospect, some of the missions leave a lot to be desired, and the lack of flying vehicles now feels inhibiting, this is still a landmark portable game. Surely it can't get any better…



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
RELEASE: 2006
…but it has. Back to the most beautiful of all of *GTA*'s cities, with fully integrated boating, flying and visuals beyond the PS2 version, *Vice City Stories* is a phenomenon. You only have to wait until October to see the full game in action, and mark our words, you will NOT be disappointed.



The Players

ON THE BRINK OF THE NEXT CONSOLE GENERATION, BATTLEFIELD 2142 IS PART OF AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF TITLES FOR PC. BUT HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH THE MACHINE'S FUTURE? DIGITAL ILLUSIONS' MARCUS NILSSON REVEALS ALL

MARCUS NILSSON

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CREATIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Marcus Nilsson would have good reason to hate *Battlefield* fans. He and his team spend years making a game, and then within a week of its release the fans have invariably broken it, forcing the team at DICE into a number of sleepless nights trying to make it all better again. "After you release a game in the *Battlefield* series, within two days people are doing things that you would never have thought about – both in a good way and a bad way," he explains. "They find problems instantly. For example, in the *Battlefield 2142* Titan mode beta, they figured out that when the commander drops a supply crate on the Titan, it repairs the shield. They're not supposed to be repairable. It took someone two hours to find that out and we missed it completely." But he doesn't hate them – in fact the fans' experimentations delight him as they would most developers. "I think it's brilliant. It's a very good sign that they like what we do. You won't start modifying something that you think is crap. They want to get in there and look in the .com files to change the suspension of different vehicles or whatever… They love that shit. We should always give them the possibility of doing it."

Battlefield 2142 has presented a number of new challenges for the Stockholm-based developer. Working on a new game with an old engine at a time when consumers are obsessing over new technology is not the most favourable situation to be in – not to mention the artistic and creative decisions that *2142*'s new futuristic setting introduces. "With a future game, you have to have an art team with a solid vision of where it wants to go, and at the same time a solid vision of the gameplay," says Nilsson. "Obviously, *Battlefield 2* and *1942* have been based on combats that actually happened – Googling a T-90 tank is faster than developing ten different concepts for a hover-tank. It puts pressure on us, but when you get to see that creative side it's really interesting to observe how that develops the people on the team."

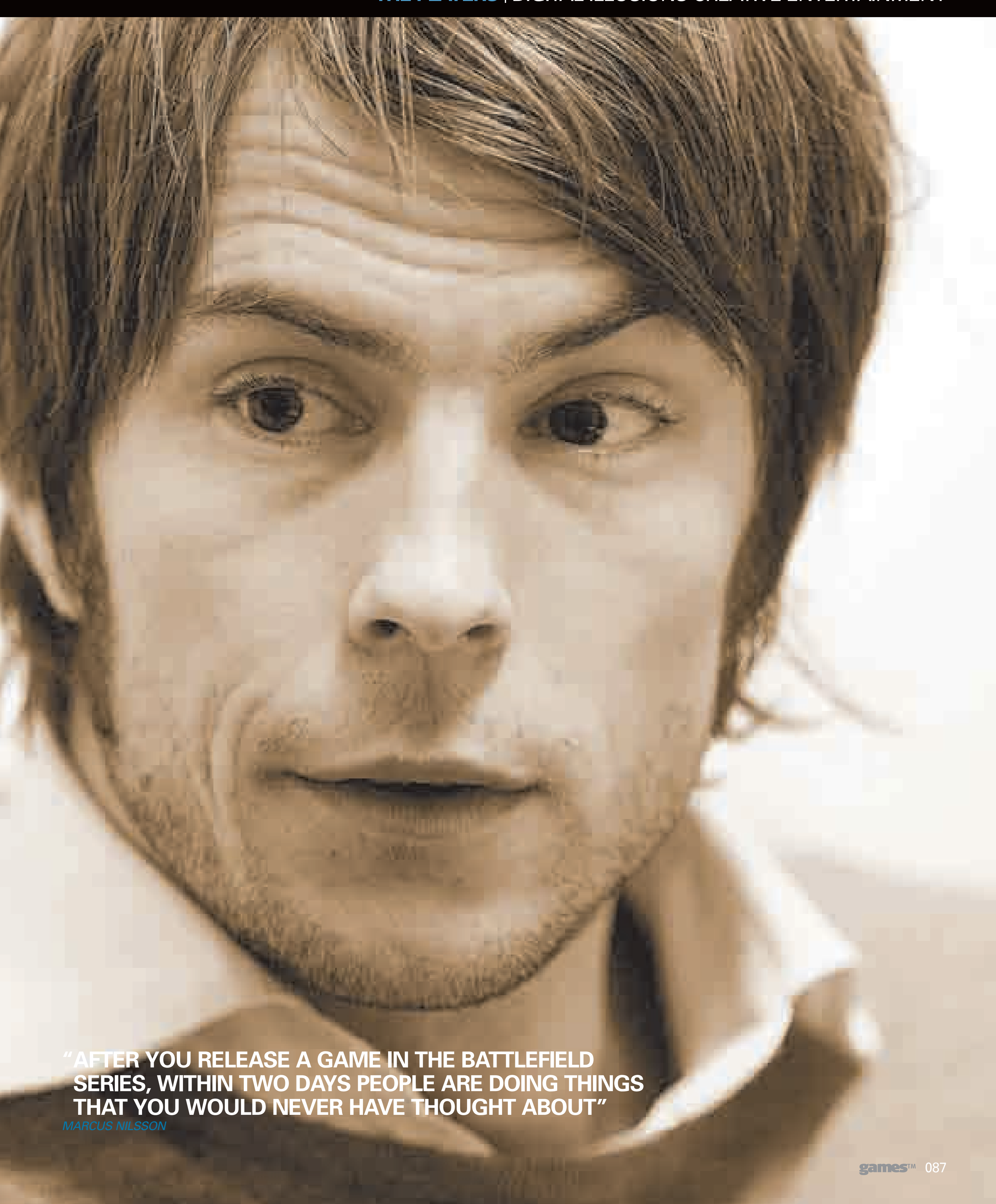
The unique challenge of developing a multi-player-only title is something that DICE is very used to – although it wasn't easy for the studio to sell the concept to a publisher. DICE's first FPS game *Codename Eagle* incorporated a single-player campaign (which Nilsson elegantly describes as "really shit") alongside its sandbox-style, bug-ridden multi-player, but it was clear where the strength of the game remained, and so DICE became one of the first developers to champion the online, multi-player-only PC game. "The innovation in combining the vehicles and infantry battle is really what we're good at," agrees Nilsson. "Everyone that works in this office dreamed about having a game like *Battlefield* long before it was in development. The way that it fuels people to play together is just brilliant.

"I am also a true believer that we could see the same popularity for an online product on consoles," posits Nilsson when asked whether he believes that such a game could ever work outside the PC market. "If you look at *Modern Combat*, our attempt at it, it's the second most played game on Live. It shows that the gameplay works, we just have to fit it into a console version."

The intention for *Battlefield 2142* is not, however, to release a parallel console version; Nilsson and DICE still have faith in the PC-exclusive market. "It's stronger than ever, I would say," he asserts. "I think that PC games are more accessible. People get interested in development through them, and it's still the natural platform for a lot of people to start developing games. I think that the Vista launch will help us out a lot with software, and also there's a lot of interest in new hardware components coming out that will improve the visual experience of playing games. I certainly think that the PC has a very large chunk of the next generation's potential."

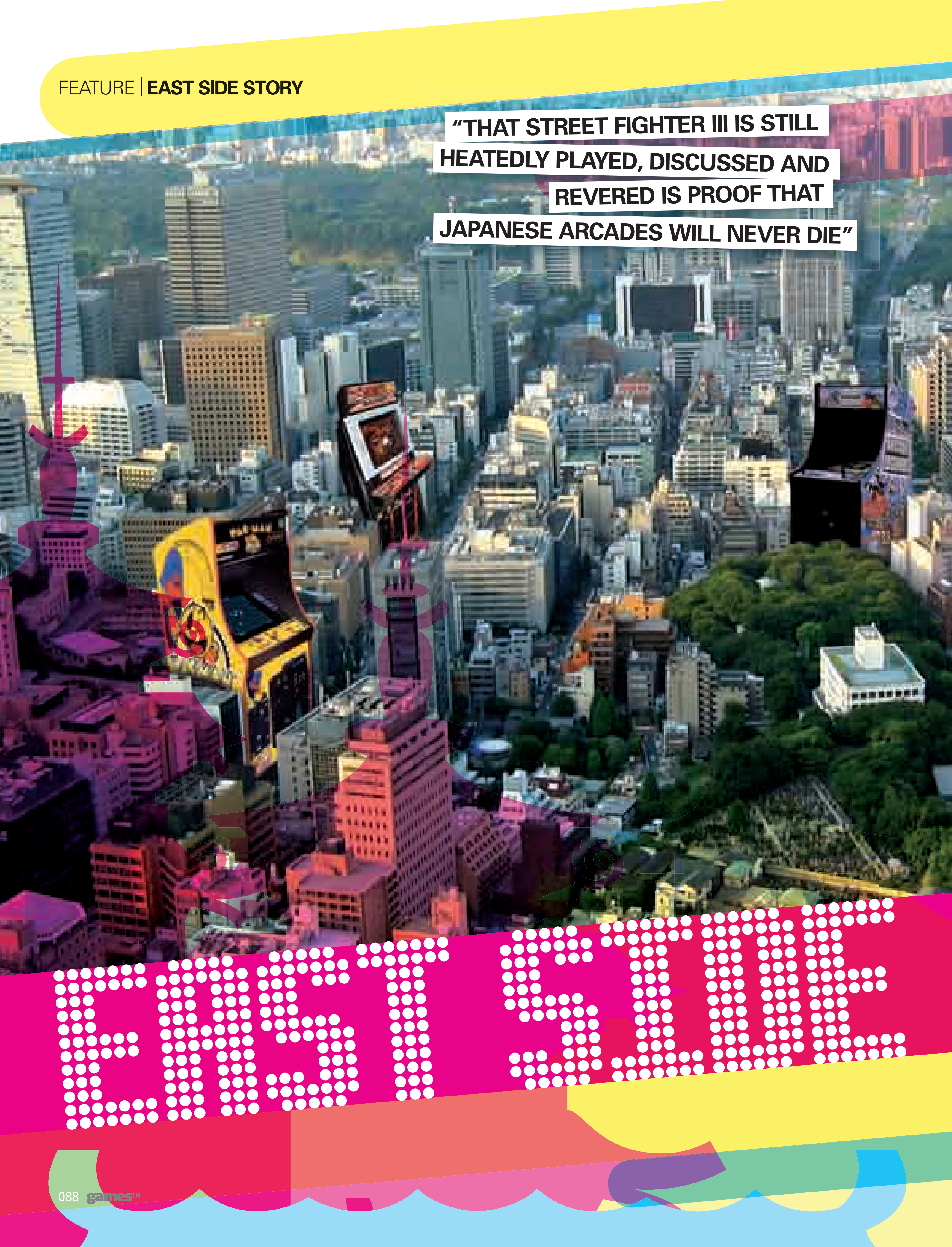
We're not convinced that *2142* (or indeed many PC games in the future) will remain exclusive, especially after the introduction of the PC-Xbox 360 crossover that Live Anywhere represents. Surely, DICE will be taking advantage of this new climate and start releasing console versions parallel to its PC releases? "If you look at *BF2* and *Modern Combat*," cautions Nilsson, "they are two different products. And they are different for a reason. If we had just put *Battlefield 2* on a console, it probably wouldn't have been a very popular game. The same would probably apply to *2142* even though there's less of a gap. Looking at what *Call Of Duty* did with its PC port, I think we're getting closer, but I think that the two target groups are fundamentally different, and that needs to be taken into account."

Battlefield 2142 *is out on PC later this year and is previewed on page 36.*



"AFTER YOU RELEASE A GAME IN THE BATTLEFIELD SERIES, WITHIN TWO DAYS PEOPLE ARE DOING THINGS THAT YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT"

MARCUS NILSSON



"THAT STREET FIGHTER III IS STILL HEATEDLY PLAYED, DISCUSSED AND REVERED IS PROOF THAT JAPANESE ARCADES WILL NEVER DIE"

EAST SIDE

One thing you'll notice if you squint at the world is that trends change. What we call 'alternative rock' one day, becomes 'pop' the next. More than consistent bliss, we humans desire change. If you believe in this more than you believe in anything else, one day your pining will be rewarded, and the great arcade experience of your youth will return.

The problem is that the arcade experience of your youth was tainted by the very idea of youth. Back then, you were possessed with a perverse desire to complete *Altered Beast* because you liked seeing large things punching, especially when those large things turned into monsters. The games ended when you'd given them enough money. Then along came *Street Fighter II* which didn't end no matter how much money you paid it – there would always be new challengers standing there elbow-to-elbow with you, knees locked, rattling the cabinet, wincing when they lost, maybe punching you out when you won.

Here, a subtle turn occurred. The differing cultures of the world dealt with it in different ways. In America, the idea of the punch was sneered at, and capitalised upon. It was once and for all carved into stone that games were tools for proving manly worth through competition. And so they began to pop up with increasing frequency in bars, in corners where previously only lonely pinball machines had rested, collecting

MANY OF US ARE JEALOUS OF THE ARCADE CULTURE IN JAPAN. THE STORIES WE HEAR AND THE TALES WE'RE TOLD PROJECT A PICTURE OF ABSOLUTE SPLENDOUR WHEN COMPARED TO OUR DILAPIDATED SCENE. BUT WHERE EXACTLY DID IT ALL GO WRONG AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT ARE WE MISSING OUT ON? OUR JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT – AND AVID ARCADE-GOER – TIM ROGERS GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE ARCADE SCENE IN JAPAN AND HOW IT CAME TO BE SO MUCH GRANDER THAN OUR OWN…

STORY



Don't walk by; drop in. Japanese arcades' inviting appearances and roadside locations get people in and get them hooked.

Japanese arcades are a home from home and are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

"FEMALES POSSESS A GREAT DEAL MORE COMMON SENSE THAN MALES, AND GENERALLY DON'T APPROVE OF WINNING AT SOMETHING UNLESS YOU WIN A PRIZE"

dust, wiped off now and then when a lonely man, having finished nursing a beer, decided to rethink what had happened with that girl while batting a ball back and forth. He'd know from the beginning that he would lose, just as in life he will die. That is to say, in Western cultures, games were recognised as fruitless pursuits, vain aspirations to perpetuity: in pinball, you try your best to keep from falling, though eventually you must fall; in *Street Fighter II*, you try your best to win against new people forever, though the world only has so many people in it, and eventually, there would be no one to challenge you.

In Japan, around this time, the idea of the back-to-back cabinet was introduced. This revolution allowed two combatants in *Street Fighter II* to sit down – yes, no more standing, they gave that up here in 1992 – in front of their own separate cabinets, with their own joysticks and their own screens, to watch the game intently. Though in America 'No Smoking' signs had only tempted those who were smoking to put cigarettes out on the plastic cabinet tops when they lost, in Japan it was accepted that the kind of men who think seriously about their *Street Fighter II* game while walking to work must also smoke cigarettes while inside an arcade. So, on each sit-down cabinet top sits an ashtray. Since that great era began, attentive staff have buzzed around with dustpans, ready to clean up the ashes atop abandoned cabinets, and wipe sweat from the joysticks with a pristine rag. And so it is that from then until today, Japanese arcades have been spotless, cigarette-stinking, dimly lit, bright places.

IN THE WEST, the arcade waned. Those who played arcade games in their youth grew older and got nostalgic for experiences like Atari's *Star Wars Arcade*, a one-of-a-kind game in which the player sits shrouded in darkness, and is treated to three-dimensional visuals of an X-Wing fighter ship approaching the Death Star. The game was more of a carnival ride than a videogame, yet it received a player's inputs, and showed him what he wanted to see.

This player nostalgia was a trick; only for the child did such games feel real. Men who would see nostalgia, turned to the cash-crafted structures found around miniature golf courses or go-kart tracks that came complete with bars – places for adults with cute, childish, or immature sides to take hypothetical dates. The games of that age were either massive monsterpieces like Konami's *X-Men Arcade* built for six players yet seldom patronised by more than three, or the new fad of virtual reality which treated players to flat-shaded, 3D immersive worlds in which it was hardly possible to do anything interesting. And here is where it happened – here is where Western arcades failed and where Japanese ones did not: Westerners would look at these virtual reality games and feel disgusted, or they'd get up on that silly snowboard machine and slide around, watching the on-screen character react almost accordingly. They would then recall how much money they'd just wasted on a stupid game.

Meanwhile in Japan, games were never 'just a stupid game'. In the days of *Space Invaders*, whether you were a student or a businessman, if you played the game, your current top score was just one of the things you filed away into your pre-conscious, like your phone number or the expiration date of your commuter pass. Japan is a country that borrowed most of its culture – architecture, sports, food, written language – from other cultures and then trimmed a layer of fat off the top. More importantly, in a country set on a narrow island where mountains render most land uninhabitable, when a person leaves his house it is to go where he must go. Where roads are a luxury and trains are king, distractions are

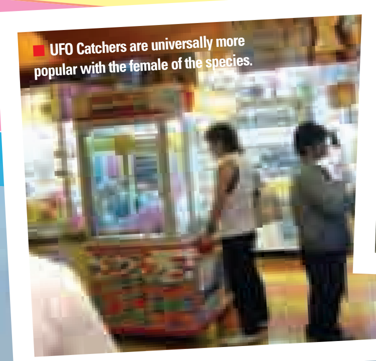
SHINJUKU NISHISPO

Shinjuku Club Sega Nishi Spot (colloquially referred to as 'Nishispo') sits nestled in the backstreets outside Shinjuku Station's west exit, or maybe the south exit, or maybe it's the new south exit – actually, no one's quite sure where this arcade is. The only way to find it is to be led there by someone who goes every week, and then start going every week yourself. If you stop going for six days, you'll forget its location automatically.

Nishispo is notorious for its strict maintenance of basement-floor space. If a game's popularity falls too far, they'll be gone in a matter of minutes. On 12 July 2006, the several-month-long beta testing of *Virtua Fighter 5* ended, and the game began its official run. The reaction to this was like a fire had broken out. The five pairs of back-to-back cabinets, equipped with 31-inch 1080p HD monitors, will no doubt see the most heated competition of all arcades in Japan.

Nishispo is where players go to unwind after work. It isn't necessarily a target of leisure activity for the hardcore elite; it's all business. This is where you go to show off your skills when you're in the Shinjuku area. And in Tokyo, everything is in the Shinjuku area.





UFO Catchers are universally more popular with the female of the species.



At TRF, girls dressed as maids randomly turn up and start beating people at *Guilty Gear*. Interesting.

generally clustered around the stations. Noodle shops that are just starting out, obviously need to be close to a train station; that's the one place everyone in town has to go, and before anyone can need new noodles, they have to want new noodles, and before they can want them, they have to try them.

So games began like new noodles. They were distractions. To this day, you can find a dim, stone dungeon of an arcade buried beneath any self-respecting Japanese train station, whether you're deep in the sweat of a Tokyo summer or doing time in a dairy-farming village in the snowy north of Hokkaido. These are the places where men originally got hooked. It was then that they began to need arcade games, and around then there existed men with names like Sega and Taito, who knew other men would be seeking arcades that were better than others, arcades where the competition would consist only of other men who had sought that arcade, and thus the monuments were born.

MEANWHILE, ACROSS THE oceans, pinball and *Time Crisis* stood together in hybrid bars, where drunk people wasted money. Eventually, if a drunk liked *Time Crisis* enough to stand there clicking the lightgun at the screen until the crisis had been averted, he'd probably find, when he was sober, that he enjoyed playing FPSs on his PC; he'd eventually seek out more skilled players online and defeat them without ever seeing their faces. In Japan, where one could play *Street Fighter II* without seeing his opponent's face since 1992, the idea of an FPS on a PC never took off – the arcade was still king.

Though hugely popular, it's still tough to find younger women in the crowd of a smoky gaming hall. Even the more metropolitan locations, in trendy shopping arcades such as Ikebukuro's Sunshine City, are looked down upon as 'tacky' by young girls. Yet, for the longest time the arcades, sometimes called game centres, were even more frowned upon by young ladies. It's not rare to look at any pop culture dating back to the late-Nineties, and see a female fictional character say to her boyfriend, "I'll go anywhere you want, just not an arcade". The reason is, generally, that females possess a great deal more common sense than males, and generally don't approve of winning at something unless you win a prize.

Metropolitan Japanese game centres have been trying to shake this anti-female image for the last decade or so. In most Sega arcades, including the famed GiGo in Ikebukuro and the stately Club Sega in Akihabara, the first floor is full of UFO Catcher machines, where skilled (read: lucky) players can score stuffed animals as prizes. Of course, competition in the UFO Catcher market has raised the value of prizes, so sometimes machines will be stocked with anime or manga-related merchandise that can't be obtained by any other means, for example, a large Sonic the Hedgehog plush doll that was available only at one UFO Catcher outside the Sega GiGo in Ikebukuro for one week in 2003.

When school girls considering arcades 'creepy' and 'smoky' hit its high in the mid-Nineties, the fad of the Print Club (shortened in Japanese as 'Purikura' – which is actually three more syllables than Print Club, though Print Club is in fact seven syllables in Japanese) miraculously rose to a swell. In a Print Club machine, patrons have their picture taken by a camera, and are then given a short time limit to doodle on the picture via an LCD touch panel. They can put hearts, stars, letters, and symbols onto images of themselves in fashionable poses. The machine prints sticker copies of the photos when the process is done; the photos are collected, traded, stuck in special books, and giggled at. This doesn't sound like something a man would do, and perhaps that's why the many various Print Club machines in arcades are policed as 'girls only'. Though there are rumours of an epidemic of occasional inter-sex misbehaviour carried out on the Purikura's extreme time limit (about three minutes), popular opinion is that karaoke booths, being more private and more stable (minimum stay: one hour) are more suitable. They do not, however, dispense souvenir photographs you can stick in your friends' yearbooks.

PURIKURA GOT YOUNG boys and girls into arcades at the same time. While the girls were fooling around in the photo booths on the first floor, the boys descended into the darkness of the basement where they committed

TRF



TRF isn't as much an arcade as it is a corner of a shopping mall with some arcade machines in it. That shopping mall is called Nakano Broadway. You'll know you're close when you hear Japanese men laughing in high voices and/or screaming like little girls as they get pummelled in fighting games.

The young owner can usually be seen buzzing around, popping open cabinets and switching out buttons. There's a TV atop an old Pachinko machine, usually playing Jackie Chan movies. All games at TRF are ¥50 per play, and every Tuesday night the owner sponsors a 'free-play' event, where you can play from 6pm until closing for just ¥300.

The current line-up at TRF includes *Melty Blood*, *Guilty Gear*, and *Rumble Fish 2*. *Street Fighter III* will always be popular, though don't expect to ever beat this one cheeky bastard who sits there playing Urien for five to six hours a day. The cheeky bastard declined an interview.

Any anthropologists out there wanting a chance to catch Japanese hardcore gamers in their element – without tapping a guy on the shoulder at a bigger arcade and asking him to take you to his house – should head to TRF. It is situated very close to the largest comic store in Japan – Mandarake – and sometimes, for whatever mythic reason, girls dressed up as maids will come, sit down, waste several dozen opponents at *Guilty Gear*, giggle, and walk away.

"MEN WILL STAND QUENCHING THIRSTS, WATCHING OTHERS CONCENTRATE, HONING THEIR OWN GAMES WITHOUT ACTUALLY PLAYING THE GAMES"

lewd acts such as drinking Dr Pepper while performing 18-hit combos. They would later meet the girls at the appointed place on the bright, happy second floor, where fun would be had by both genders in front of lightgun games about killing zombies or criminals (same thing), or the girls would watch the boys race each other in big car-shaped contraptions.

The goal was to get the girls interested in games, though perhaps that happened in a different way from expected. The most popular games with girls have historically been the Purikura, which perhaps isn't a game at all – unless you consider the 'final boss' to be writing all six of your friends' names over the picture before the time limit runs out. Currently, the hottest game in Japanese arcades is Sega's *MJ3*, where the 'MJ' stands for 'Mahjongg'. *MJ3* sits against a wall on one of the higher floors of most arcade towers, for the same reason milk, eggs, and bread are in the back of the grocery store. This is the floor where all the amusement games lie. You will see them as hulking contraptions with shiny apparatus inside, which dispenses 'medals' if you win a touch-screen mini-game playing on a side panel. Or else these games will be great horseracing simulators, with horses racing on a screen as wide as a Tokyo apartment. The horses are bred and raised by players, captured on playing cards, and activated for ¥100 per play. The soccer simulators work the same way, as does the recent *Three Kingdoms* war simulator. Enix and Taito are proud makers of 'medal' games involving the *Mysterious Dungeon* style of play, and other dungeon crawlers, like Sega's *The Key Of Avalon*, only feel like they should be dispensing medals.

Will Japanese arcades ever die? It doesn't seem likely. Too many monuments have been built, too many pay-for-play museums housing relics of the arcade era – that era, then, will never die. Even with Wii online at home, the casual Japanese gamer still might feel the need to get out of the house. Even with sparkling graphics at home, even with downloadable retro games and a big HDTV, the most hardcore of otaku will have it in his blood for generations to come to head to Taito's Hirose Entertainment Yard – HEY – in Akihabara, to sit down and play Radiant Silvergun, or to stand by, smoking, and watch a wordless comrade dodge pink bullet patterns in whatever traditional shooting game by Cave is newest, loudest, and stars the prettiest cartoon girls. On the days these games debut, the devoted will gladly wait in line, play once, lose, and get back to the end of the line. Men will stand quenching thirsts, watching others concentrate, honing their own games without actually playing the games. The devoted are loved by the other devoted – never by themselves, and never by the game. They will not play the games at home because they understand that their need to achieve wonders in imaginable worlds lies behind a door that can be opened only by walking a distance, maybe in the rain, and entering a structure full of noise, which is not home.

THEN THERE ARE the hobbyists and the fetishists that hang out on floor seven of Taito's TRY Amusement Tower. Also in Akihabara, TRY is hidden down a back street a few blocks south of Taito's Saito Amusement Yard, SAY. TRY is the oldest arcade in Akihabara, and since the late-Seventies has been overrun with Pachinko and slot machines. The first floor smells like being drowned in a hot bucket of cigarette water. Decades of serious men's bad habits have settled down the stone staircases. Up on the seventh floor is the only place in Japan where you'll see complete strangers talking to one another while playing *Street Fighter II*. The floor is structured like a high-school bathroom, with gray walls, flickering fluorescent lights, and windows high up near the ceiling. This place was made before atmosphere was a trend. Near the stairs is an original *Darius* cabinet,

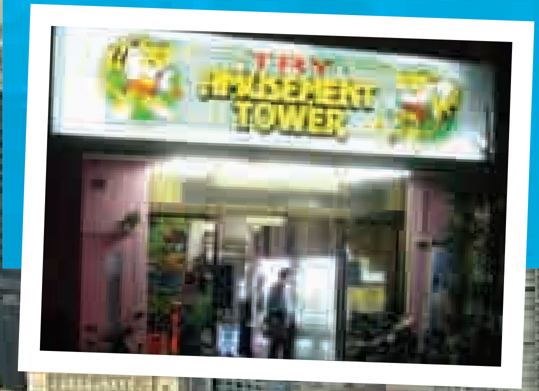
TRY AMUSEMENT TOWER

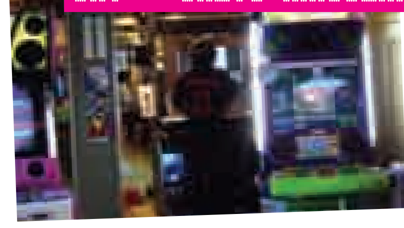
TRY is an Akihabara landmark, a last bastion of the days when arcades were hidden, dingy places. Inside, you'll find that the bottom floor, traditionally the 'mainstream' floor, houses only lightgun and driving games, usually the stuff of the second floor of a normal arcade. Above that are five floors of medal games, Pachinko and slots.

It's important to know that medal games, Pachinko and slots constitute the 'Amusement' portion of an arcade. If an arcade has 'Amusement' in its name, there's a 75 per cent chance that it exists primarily for old men who smoke and daydream about money.

If you can brave the shaking elevator or smoky stairs up to the seventh floor, you'll find a curious collection of old videogame machines. You may or may not have a religious experience depending on your religion.

Take the stairs down and gawk wide-eyed at the amazing and nearly comprehensive collection of old arcade posters plastering the walls all the way up the stairwell.





SAY – SAITO AMUSEMENT YARD

SAY is located just up the Akihabara strip from TRY. Unlike TRY, SAY sits right out on the main street. It is a great pink building that used to not be pink. It stands as a prime example of a modern Japanese business establishment being crammed into a building that has existed for far too many decades. Ascending to the narrow top floors of SAY, where *Initial D* is the game of choice for many schoolboys, is an affair involving stairs, catwalks and elevators. Notice SAY is an exception to the 'Amusement' rule; it features no amusement machines. It is purely 'Entertainment'.

On the Taiko machine out in front, every Saturday a mysterious thing occurs: a man whose name is not known will take up a drum stick in each hand, insert two credits, put on the theme song from *Pretty Cure* and play both drums on the hardest difficulty, simultaneously. He will not miss a beat. By the end of this performance, the audience will have spilled over into the street – conveniently closed to automobile traffic before 5pm on weekends. The next song of his set will blow minds, and then he ties a white hand towel over his eyes and beats out one last flawless song. He is cheered and lauded. Then the pudgy man walks away, dabbing his forehead with the towel. This is not an urban legend, because it actually happens.

one of the few games to ever sport a headphone jack. One of the favourite games at TRY is Data East's shooter *Midnight Resistance* – a buggy, side-scrolling run-n-gun with a special joystick that, when twisted, changes the direction of your character's gun. There are a couple of cabinets with easily replaceable boards; the arcade staff take requests via a notebook on a nearby table. Sometimes, you'll see *The Outfoxies*, Namco's 1994 masterpiece. This spiritual successor to *Rolling Thunder 3* presents duels between two secret agents via a violently in-and-out scaling cross-section side-view of buildings. The game is something of a one-on-one fighter cross-bred with a run-n-gun, revisioned while thinking forward. "And then *Virtua Fighter* came," a bearded Japanese dude explains one night while playing, "and Namco turned toward 3D. *Tekken*, *Ridge Racer*. They lost their edge, man. *Outfoxies* was the future!"

That future, unfortunately doesn't exist anymore. What's become clear is that makers of arcade games need to take sides. If you make a racer, it has to be 3D and shiny. If you make a fighter, you can go with either polygons (the new *Virtua Fighter 5* looks to reinvent the polygon for the fifth time) or sprites (*King Of Fighters* maintains a massive fan following), and there's always competition. Always. Just don't mix the two.

The Rumble Fish, a little-understood fighting game by Dimps, for the Atomiswave arcade hardware, got a sequel in 2005, called *The Rumble Fish 2*. Known for its clean character designs and hi-res graphics, the game blends the combo systems of 3D fighters, with distinctly 2D gameplay. The fans of this game love it above all other 2D fighters, and claim that it might be the greatest of its genre. They're the most fanatical fans a game-maker could ever hope to have. The problem is there are only about 300 of them.

One double-sided *Rumble Fish 2* cabinet used to sit in the basement of every major arcade in Tokyo. As of January 2006 however, only Shinjuku Club Sega Nishi Spot ('Nishispo') had a machine, where Dimps occasionally sponsored 'free-play' events to drum up interest in the game. At the time of writing, another machine has popped up in Club Sega in Akihabara as well, though it might not be there forever. There's a certain thrill in playing a game that won't be around for long. Any well-stocked arcade has a retro *Ms Pac-Man* machine, for example. *Rumble Fish 2* is the true endangered species. In five years, people will be paying hundreds of thousands of yen for arcade boards of it, and then appropriately stocking those arcade boards on shelves in their homes.

Though its circulation is now up by 200 per cent on six months ago, there is little question that *Rumble Fish 2* will fade. It is said that buffalo in the USA once dropped in numbers to precisely 11, though I reckon buffalo have sexual means of reproduction and *The Rumble Fish 2* doesn't. What will happen when it's gone? One day it might show up in TRY, and someone who's a college student right now might tell you that this game was the future. For today though, the fans play it intently and deeply, earning no rewards they can carry home. When the game is gone, it will be gone only because there are too many games. They'll talk about how great it was for a while, then they'll just go ahead and play something else. Probably *Street Fighter III*. Everybody still plays that.

That *Street Fighter III* is still heatedly played, discussed, and revered is proof that Japanese arcades will never die. Many paths have led the Japanese arcade to where it is today; that genres like the 2D fighter flourished as they did, that games like *Virtua Fighter 5* are poised to become net-televised gamer sports is evidence that people will, time and time again, love these games and continue passing them down. Calling the established genres of fighting and shooting 'boring' is like calling running a boring sport, or saying that holding hands is a boring thing for couples to pass the time with. In the end, everything we do is something we do. Some nights, we feel like being places we are not, being people we are not, and punching, and kicking, and shooting. It's healthy. Though all the cigarette smoke is probably bad for you.

"IN JAPAN, WHERE ONE COULD PLAY STREET FIGHTER II WITHOUT SEEING HIS OPPONENT'S FACE SINCE 1992, THE IDEA OF A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER ON A PC NEVER TOOK OFF"

HEY – HIROSE ENTERTAINMENT YARD





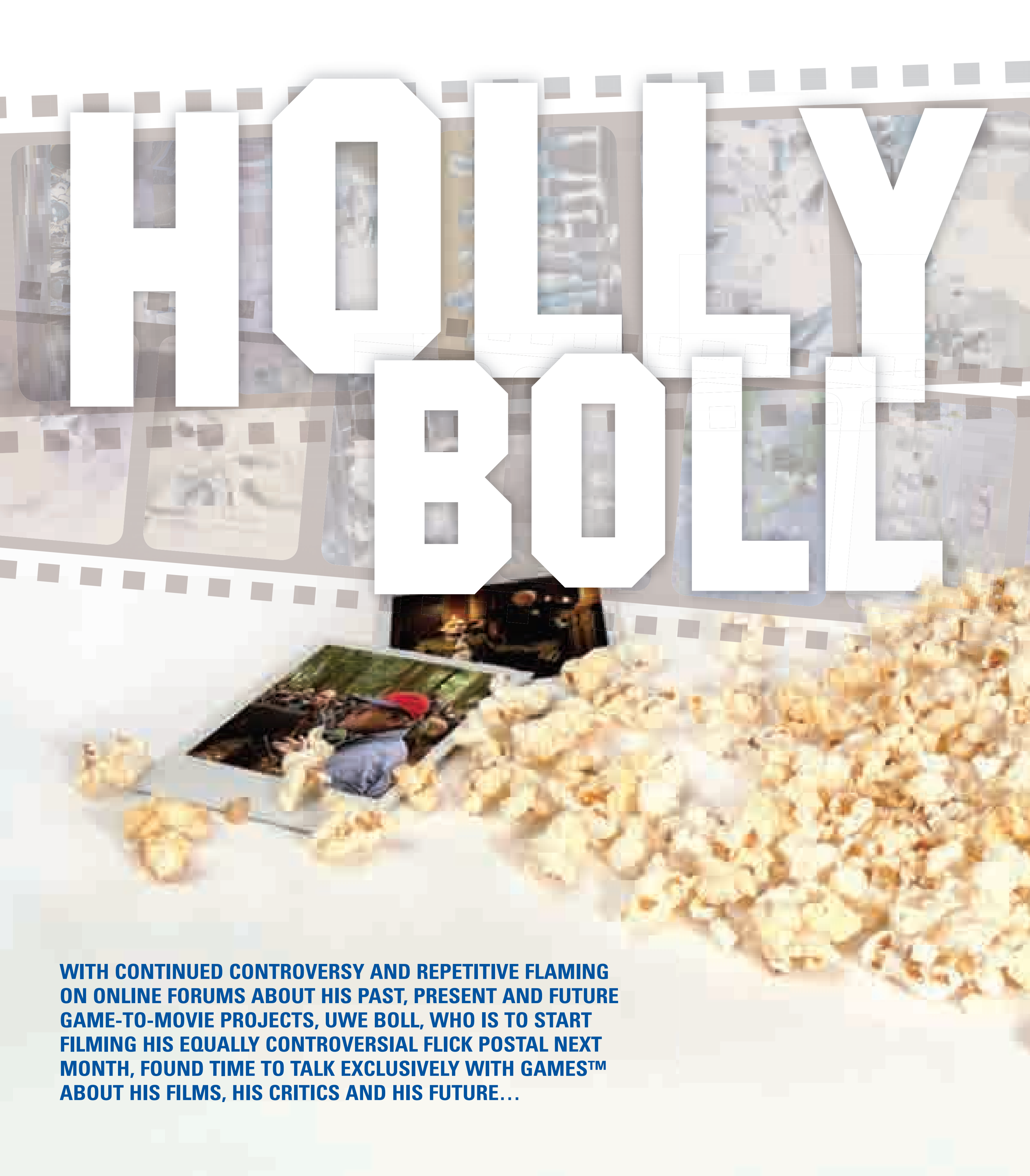
Akihabara's HEY is hands-down the best arcade in Japan and probably the world. Okay maybe not, though it's still really nice.

The first floor contains three UFO Catcher machines. Ascend the escalator or one of two staircases to find the main floor and home of the most tasteful shooting game selection in Japan. Every game by Cave, Japan's current champion of traditional top-down shooters, debuts at HEY where it is watched and scrutinised by warriors-to-be for weeks before the games' wide release.

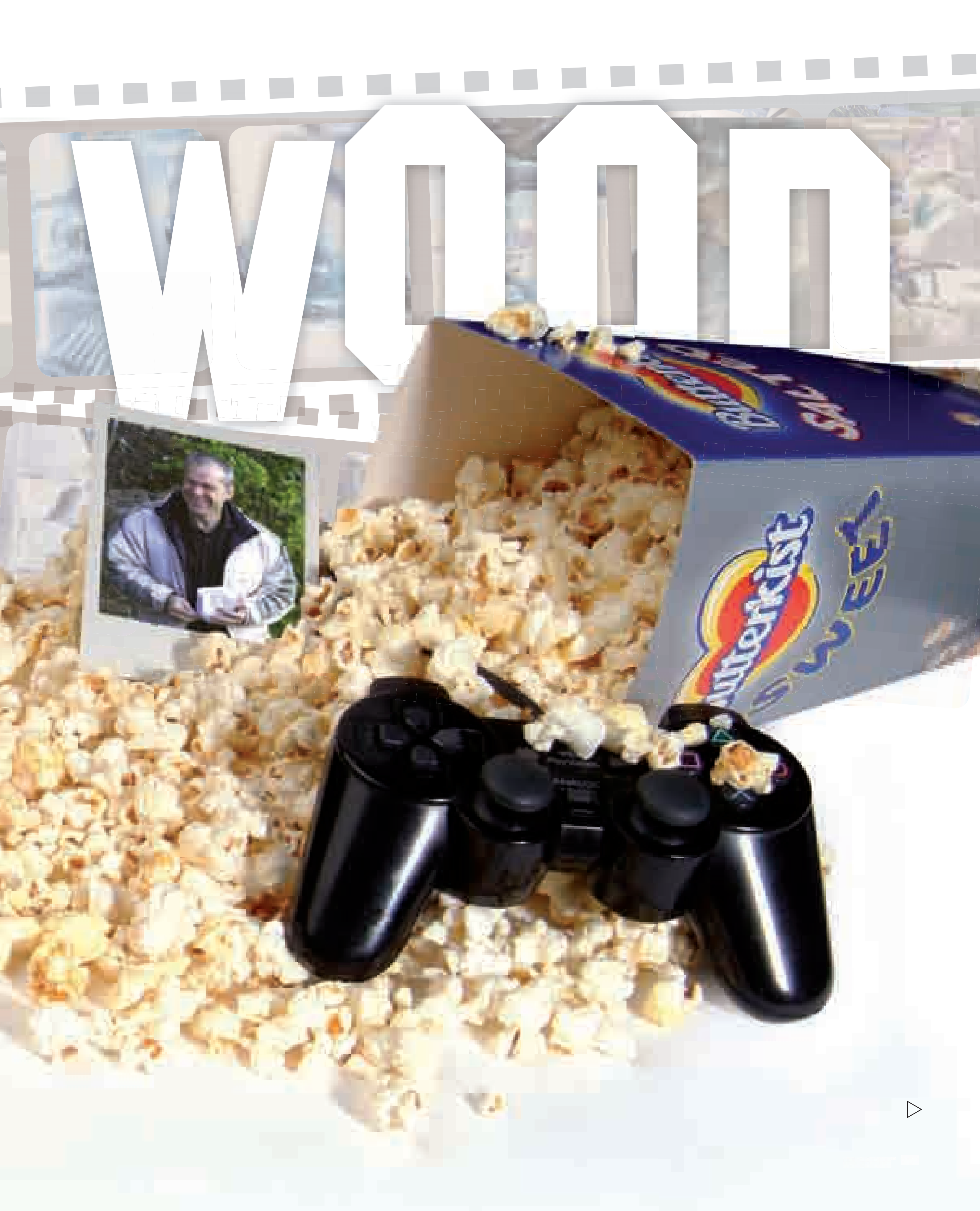
The next floor is fighting games. You can find anything here except *Virtua Fighter* – it's widely believed that if you want *Virtua Fighter*, you know where to get it. *Street Fighter III* and the various *Guilty Gears* are the scream of the week here. Against the wall on the third floor is a set of ¥10-per-life games. Currently featured is the entire *Metal Slug* series up to *5*. It's cheap entertainment.

If you can get past the stoic, stuffed-up atmosphere, you'll find that HEY indeed features some impeccable selections of games. Just don't dare try to take any pictures inside, because a very angry little man will escort you to the staircase.

HOLLY BOLL



WITH CONTINUED CONTROVERSY AND REPETITIVE FLAMING ON ONLINE FORUMS ABOUT HIS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE GAME-TO-MOVIE PROJECTS, UWE BOLL, WHO IS TO START FILMING HIS EQUALLY CONTROVERSIAL FLICK POSTAL NEXT MONTH, FOUND TIME TO TALK EXCLUSIVELY WITH GAMES™ ABOUT HIS FILMS, HIS CRITICS AND HIS FUTURE…


WOOD



A BOLL KG PRODUCTION...

HOUSE OF THE DEAD [2003]
Boll's first videogame adaptation and one of the worst films ever made – including most of the films by Paul WS Anderson – and the reason behind many gamers' disgust.

ALONE IN THE DARK [2005]
Tara Reid as the curator of a museum – can anyone spot the mistake? Boll was once asked about his disastrous experience with *AITD*: he replied that, "A script matters".

BLOODRAYNE [2005]
An improvement over *Alone In The Dark*, the highlight of *BloodRayne* is the skimpy-clothed Kristanna Loken, the lowlight being her somewhat awkward sex scene.

IN THE NAME OF THE KING: A DUNGEON SIEGE TALE [2007]
Currently in post-production, the film boasts a cast line-up including Jason Statham, Ray Liotta, Ron Perlman, Burt Reynolds, Claire Forlani and many more. Incredible.

COMING SOON...

SEED [2007]
Very little is know about Boll's next project, which he began shooting last month. Perhaps choosing a game most people don't know will result in less fan flak?

POSTAL [2007]
Banned in multiple countries, this controversial film based on a widely controversial game will see *Postal* figure Gary Coleman reprise his role for the feature-film.

FAR CRY [2008]
With filming scheduled to begin next year, we're hoping Boll will have notched up enough experience from the next four films to turn out a respected conversion.

Type 'Uwe Boll' into Google. It's a fair assumption that the vast majority of the 1.7 million hits are somewhat negative toward the 41-year-old filmmaker who, up until three years ago, spent the prior decade writing, directing and producing several low-budget movies you wouldn't have heard of. Virtually unknown, his shift into videogame adaptations is making him a household name with gamers – but for all the wrong reasons – earning him a considerable amount of criticism across almost all movie and videogame sites and forums since the unpopular arrival of his videogame-to-cinema conversion of Sega's hugely loved *House Of The Dead* franchise in 2003.

So much has been written about him already – he's been dubbed The Master Of Error – that it's difficult not to draw any neutral conclusions. "I have Down syndrome and I finance my films with Nazi gold," was the amused response he gave when asked what were the best rumours he'd read about himself on the Internet. Even with so much traffic berating his films, the Internet is a place Boll is rumoured to visit often, posting on various message boards such as popular DVD website The Digital Bits and IGN – he's certainly a man with something to say, if only in so many words.

It wouldn't be incorrect to suggest that Uwe (pronounced 'Ooo-vay') is probably the most hated man working in the film industry today – perhaps more so than Paul WS Anderson – given his outspoken self-belief that he is creating first-rate movies that compare and surpass the many Hollywood horrors that are being generated today. In fact, it could be this very air of arrogance that opens him up to incensed critical attacks by movie and videogame fans alike, refusing to acknowledge that his videogame films to date are, perhaps, not actually very good.

"It's normal to crash game adaptations, especially if Uwe Boll is involved," is his frustrated response to ever-increasing critical punishment. Perhaps so, and this has certainly become the case with Boll's movies, with *In The Name Of The King: A Dungeon Siege Tale* already receiving a mauling before the film is even released. Just seeing the words 'Boll KG' sends shivers down most gamers' backs, especially when linked to a favoured videogame franchise.

Yet Boll doesn't pander to his critics or attempt to win them over, he seems happy courting controversy, preferring to retaliate with equally spiteful comments, with AintItCoolNews duo Harry Knowles and Quint receiving particular attention when Boll was asked if he expected their sharply negative review of *BloodRayne* earlier this year: "No. Harry and Quint are retards." More fuel for the fire, Mr Boll.

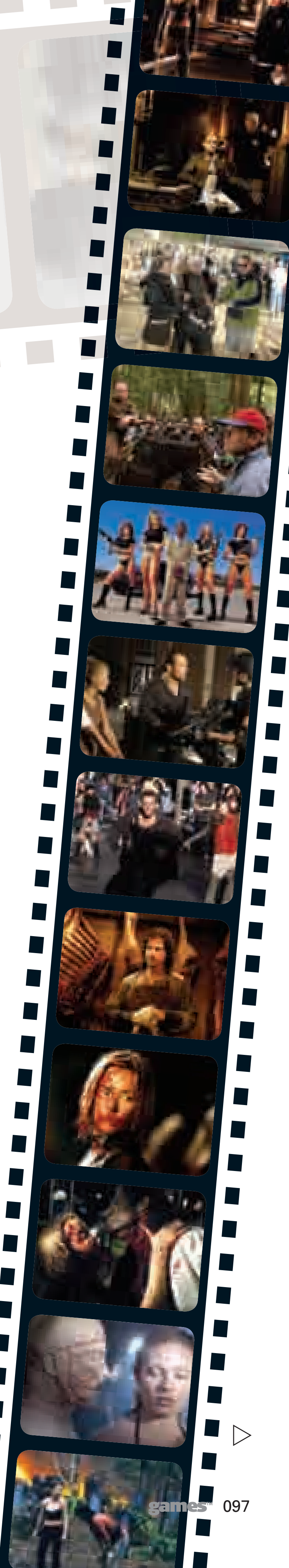
MANY OF THE critical judgements Uwe has come in for have resulted from his continued deviation from the games' environments, such as the original plots, the settings, locations and details that made the games the successes that they are: "What do you mean?" Boll responds. "I incorporated endless zombies into the infamous house and had an array of bullets in *House Of The Dead. Alone In The Dark* retained the character of Edward and had numerous artefacts while flashlight beams articulated many of the shots. *BloodRayne* celebrated its central character complete with her sexy clothing. I kept the role of Kagan, numerous vampires and Brimstone among other references from the game. *House Of The Dead* was a prequel to the game. *Alone In The Dark* started after *A New Nightmare* in expectation of *Ataris*; and *Alone* and *BloodRayne* were presented as prequels."

"VIDEOGAME COMPANIES COUNT ON THE FACT THAT THE MOVIE WILL SUPPORT GAME SALES, BUT THEY'RE NOT WILLING TO SPEND MONEY. IT'S NOT HEALTHY"

Do videogame companies themselves actually support Boll with his game adaptations? Well, this is something on which the man is particularly outspoken: "They are not strong in cross-promoting," he revealed. "A lot of videogame companies are wrong in how they support videogame-based movies – they get a fee for the licence and then don't do anything to promote the movie. They don't do videogame tie-ins, they don't do cross promotions; they count on the fact that the movie will support the game sales, but they're not willing to spend any money on cross-promoting anything. This is not healthy."

Despite the poor press of Boll's films, and indeed himself, his casting talent continues to improve with each passing film, and *A Dungeon Siege Tale* is boasting the most impressive yet. So what's his secret? "The cast are drawn to the scripts, and like my previous films." While it's difficult to believe that this is primarily the case, Boll does have a good reputation to work with, which is far more plausible – although, based on his cast's performances, perhaps they fancy a fast buck and fun over the stress and serious work of more time-consuming jobs. With the exception of *Alone In The Dark*'s Tara Reid – who refused to go topless for a love scene with Christian Slater – Boll has in return enjoyed working with each principle cast, citing "[Christian] Slater, [Kristanna] Loken, [Ron] Perlman, [Jason] Statham and [John] Rhys-Davies," as particular favourites.

But why videogames? What prompted the German director to ditch his low-budget indie flicks in favour of the arguably more judgemental videogame adaptations? "It's an enormous market. Videogame adaptations sell extremely well on DVD," Boll reveals with refreshing honesty. It's perhaps this mercenary filmmaking that has led his outspoken critics to accuse him of raping the tax breaks from his native country – German tax laws reward German-owned films by allowing them to write off one hundred per cent of their investment as a tax deduction – with ▷





many believing he is only creating these schlock videogame movies to make money, uncaring of the script, the direction, the performances from his cast and the whirlwind production times, ergo the hatred toward his movies and indeed he himself.

ALTHOUGH VERY UNLIKELY, in a world where many seek an easy way to earn thick rolls of currency, you could hardly blame him should there have been any truth to it. A film fan from an early age, Boll produced short movies on Super 8mm film and video. His interest then led him to study film direction in Munich and Vienna, he also studied literature – earning himself a doctorate – as well as film, management and marketing in Cologne and Siegen. "I rely heavily on other films, books, television and reality itself as my source of inspiration," Boll explains on the influences that have led him to this point. He indicates that, "A great storyline, intriguing characters and a realistic budget", are the key factors in his decision-making process when selecting a game franchise to produce. He continues with invigorated enthusiasm, "I play the game, buy the game rights, develop a variety of treatments, have the script written and polished, and then prep, cast, shoot, complete post-production, and market".

While many have been quick to mock Boll's movies – admittedly, ourselves included, although he's become something of a cult hero within our walls – you have to admire the success he's had thus far. "*House Of The Dead* has been the biggest money maker so far with over a $100 million in gross sales. To date, *Alone In The Dark* and *BloodRayne* have broken even. However, more territories will be opening throughout 2006 for both", he proudly and prudently presses upon us. Given the chance, could any of us do a better job?

Since *BloodRayne*'s release in May, the DVD has sold over half a million copies, so clearly there's an audience out there that likes Boll's movies. Okay, so who? Horror fans? Videogame fans? "Everyone who enjoys the particular genre I explore," Boll states quite vaguely. "I create genre films with great casts and high production values," he further responds as we try to nudge him on the subject.

Regardless of the reasons behind his films' 'success' (for want of a better word), all three of the videogame films he's directed are listed on IMDb's Bottom 100 – a feat all the more impressive considering that virtually every film ever made in the history of cinema is listed on IMDb. But Boll has been fiercely vocal about this service, claiming that thousands of hatemongers rated *BloodRayne* as a 'zero' before the film was even released, questioning the fairness of such services and claiming that those opposed to his films are in the minority. Perhaps, but how many people do you know that like his movies, regardless of whether the name 'Uwe Boll' is attached to it or not?

And yet, Boll is not afraid to acknowledge some of the mistakes that he has made, "I wouldn't have game footage in *House Of The Dead*, and would have used a different screen adaptation. Tara Reid wouldn't be present in *Alone In The Dark*", he reveals. The former comment is particularly interesting given that earlier in the interview we asked him why he decided to put clips of the *House Of The Dead* game in the movie? "It was a great way of celebrating the game in the context of the film. It had a kind of Andy Warhol feel." We're fairly sure Mr Warhol would disagree.

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, there was conflict between Reid and Boll on the set of *Alone In The Dark*, due to a refusal to disrobe – on Reid's part, that is. On the DVD commentary for the film, Boll comments, "What is a disappointment for all the fans is that Tara Reid is not losing her bra – but this is a typical prude US thing. The actresses are not willing to play nudity normally and it's very disappointing, especially for us Europeans and for the US audience. Good that Kristanna Loken in *BloodRayne* is full naked."

Yet throughout any criticism and cynicism of Boll's movies, you have to admire him. He has an iron-clad will to continue his quest to make the perfect videogame movie, brushing condemnation aside as frequently as empty shells hitting the floor in *House Of The Dead*. His determination to improve not only as a film director is evident, with *BloodRayne* arguably better than *Alone In The Dark*, and both superior to *House Of The Dead*. One can only hope that *A Dungeon Siege Tale* continues the trend while proving better than the trailer suggests.

Boll continues to make a profit, with the success of *House Of The Dead* the reason behind his decision to tackle *Alone In The Dark* and so forth. When reflecting on his prior completed works and games, "I had a great time playing *House Of The Dead*", he confirms. "I'm the most proud of *BloodRayne*. We kept the game brands, fighting styles etc." Boll is also not without admiration for other videogame adaptations out there, "*Silent Hill* was very good, as was *Resident Evil*".

When he's not responding to a fresh source of critique, Boll enjoys playing *Hitman*, *Silent Hill* and *Postal*; singling out *Hitman* as his favourite videogame and pre-empting our next question with, "Yes, I would

"**HOUSE OF THE DEAD** WAS A GREAT WAY OF **CELEBRATING THE GAME** IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FILM. IT HAD **A KIND OF ANDY WARHOL FEEL**"



like to turn it into a feature film". Pity for Boll then that, although without a director, 20th Century Fox has already set the wheels in motion for Agent 47's adventures with Vin Diesel as the bald-headed gun-for-hire.

With *In The Name Of The King: A Dungeon Siege Tale* due for release next year, Boll has decided to tackle the publicity for this game-based movie in a different way, "With *Dungeon Siege*, for the first time I won't advertise the fact that it's a videogame-based movie". He goes on to say that, "We're doing a big epic with big emotion. If people liked *Dances With Wolves* or *Braveheart*, they'll like this movie. If fans of the game go to the theatre as well, then fine. We're happy to attract that audience. But we won't make a big deal about it… it's not going to be promoted like a new *Tomb Raider*".

Talking with Uwe about his future projects, he excitedly informed us: "*Seed* and *Postal* I wrote myself and will shoot this summer. *Hunter* I sold to Mindfire. *Far Cry* I will film in 2007". As for beyond that, "Filming *Alone In The Dark II* and *BloodRayne II*", he concludes. It would appear that nothing will detract or deter Uwe Boll from continuing to exploit the success of a videogame series, and if his movies continue to sell, attracting audiences and making a profit, why should he stop?



PUT UP OR SHUT UP

A stroke of recent genius has been Boll's inspired way of tackling his biggest critics, by way of challenging his most vocal adversaries to a boxing match. He has invited his top five most outspoken critics of 2005 – who must have written at least two extremely negative articles last year – to appear in his feature film *Postal* with airfares and hotel expenses to Vancouver being paid by Boll's production company, Boll KG.

As Boll's guests, they'll have the chance to be an extra in *Postal*, before having the opportunity to enter the boxing ring to fight Boll himself in a ten-bout match. Again, he's a genius. Incredibly, these five matches will occur over the last two days of shooting *Postal* – Boll's clearly confident he won't sustain many injuries, especially given his boxing background – with certain scenes (read: clips of extreme punishment) from the boxing matches (read: arena of revenge) becoming part of the *Postal* movie. All five fights will also be televised on the Internet and covered by international press. Mr Boll, we salute you.

FUTURE SHOCK



Emotion has always been present in videogames, but the next generation of console seems to be focusing more and more on how we feel while playing. One of the more ambitious projects we've seen in a while is BioShock – a title aiming to involve us on various emotional levels. games™ heads off to find out exactly how the team is planning on doing it and how the title is progressing…



Signs like these may look boring, but they help provide the atmosphere and style of the title.

Loneliness, oppression, dread. They're not really the jingles you want your alarm clock to wake you up with, but in videogames we just can't get enough. There's a deep satisfaction in creeping through virtual space stations and haunted mansions – in the case of American real estate agents, Charlie Sheen's bedroom – and being genuinely scared for our lives. Unfortunately, most games aren't that unsettling; they tend to rely more on humdrum 'monster closets' than frightening atmospheres. And this is why Irrational Games' 1999 FPS/RPG *System Shock 2*, with its unrelenting isolation and slow-paced tension, was such a welcomed change for both gamers and critics. Now, Irrational is planning to take *Shock 2's* design principles to unprecedented depths – literally and figuratively – with *BioShock*. If you've never played *Shock 2*, you may not know how Irrational Games spooked its audience so elegantly. Ken Levine, the game's lead designer, explains the difference between *Shock 2* and *BioShock's* approach to horror, and the perfunctory scares in, say, *F.E.A.R.* and *DOOM 3*.

"There's two kinds of isolation," Levine says. "One is being alone, and the other is, well… have you ever gone to party where you don't know anyone other than maybe your ex-girlfriend? That's the feeling of *BioShock*. I think most FPSs face the problem of not taking their worlds seriously enough. They discount the value of emotional engagement for the player, and the value of making the world believable. If you think back to 1999, you had those corridors from *Quake II*, and the very contrived, deathmatch-type spaces. What we did was say, 'You know, *System Shock 2* doesn't take place in an arbitrary piece of geometry; it takes place in a bar, it takes place in a living room, in a lab – places people can relate to.' We said, 'Hey, let's have a world that doesn't feel like it's only about shooting people.' And so when there is shooting it's much more dramatic because it's a contrast to all the stuff you can relate to. In *BioShock*, we're taking that to the nth degree."

OTHERWISE ORDINARY SPACES – bars, homes, amusement parks and so on – are made to seem eerie by setting them in environments hostile to humans. In *Shock 2*, you were stranded on a derelict spaceship that once served as both transport and living quarters for its crew – *BioShock* has you in a ruined paradise under the sea. "The game is set in a failed underwater utopia called Rapture," Levine gestures. "It was built at the bottom of the sea in 1946 by a man named Andrew Ryan. He had a dream to get away from what he saw as people who 'take' in the world, rather than people who 'create' – not a fan of new America, not a fan of the Soviets. He's worried about the atomic bomb hovering over everything, and he's saying, 'There's got to be another way for people like me: creators. The best scientists, the best musicians, the best artists, the best athletes. To get away to a place where the government won't take our money, where the censors won't try to stop our art, and where The Bomb won't hang over us'. Rapture is the solution he comes up with."

Of course, something goes horribly wrong, but we'll get to that later. First, it should be noted that familiarity isn't the only way Irrational plans to terrify you. It will also be using its token non-linearity – "emergent gameplay", as Levine puts it – to leave you with some very difficult choices. Specifically? In certain parts of the game, you'll encounter 'Little Sisters', mutated girls who are forced to extract and carry genetic material from Rapture's deceased inhabitants. This genetic material forms *BioShock's* most precious resource, Adam, and if you're not prepared to put in the hard work finding Adam in other parts of the game, you're going to have to take it from them. And since Little Sisters are protected by the diving suit-wearing, heavily armed Big Daddies, the 'taking' will almost

CUSTOM ACCESSORIES

Although Levine strives to clarify that you'll be able to make myriad choices, that don't involve combat, there's no doubt many players will want a bit of action. Although, even here you're going to have to make a lot more choices than just flipping between the pistol and the grenade launcher. Levine explains: "You'll be modifying your base weapons in really creative ways, with objects you find in the world. So the grenades are old tomato soup cans full of nitrogen, glass, and nails. Weapons all have a very hand-crafted feel to them. I think a lot of games say: 'IT'S GOING TO BE THE BIGGEST FKING GUN YOU'VE EVER SEEN IN YOUR LIFE'! What we're saying is, 'Hey, I want you to understand how this gun works. I want you to have a hand in building this gun.' You know, when people send you an all-caps email? Nothing is caps when everything is caps. And in many shooters, everything's in caps, you know? When you modify your own weapon, it becomes even cooler, because you can see how it works. In one of our weapons, you can have carbon dioxide cartridges that you can bore into the barrels of your guns to act as an accelerant."**

certainly be violent, perhaps leading to their deaths.

Levine shudders, "I don't think I'd be able to do that. But it's all about player choice – there are other ways to approach the same problem. The question is, are you going to exploit these Little Sisters, or are you going to find another way? It's very easy to sit back in judgement – we all do that – and say, 'Oh, the big corporations, and the this, and the that, and the government, and they're exploiting everyone', but what happens when you're put in that position? Do you choose to exploit, or do you find a more difficult but much more morally tenable way to solve a problem? We wanted to extend that player choice and make it meaningful."

THE SYSTEMIC GAMEPLAY is heightened by a powerful AI system, the 'AI Ecology'. To explain the system, Levine returns to the Big Daddies and Little Sisters. "They have this relationship with each other," he elaborates. "She goes around finding genetic material, and the Big Daddy's job is to protect her. He helps her in and out of hiding holes, they talk to each other, they mourn each other when one is killed, and the Little Sister looks for protection behind the Big Daddy. If she's being shot at, the Big Daddy will grab her by the scruff and pull her out of harm's way. So they won't bother you if you don't bother them. But they're a resource, so you have a decision to make as to how you deal with them. And there are other AIs out there that want what they have as well."

"The Slicers – the more typical AIs in the game – will be hostile to you and often to the Big Daddies and Little Sisters if they think the risk is worth it for them. In a situation where you wear down the Big Daddy, they may see an opportunity there. If they get bored they walk around and try to get resources from machines, so you may see them banging on machines. And they search other bodies. Also, there's a whole security system – we have security turrets, security bots, and you can hack into those systems and take control of them. And bots will follow you around and protect you, and security turrets won't attack you. If there's a guy you can't deal with, you could use the security system against him."

Irrational has invested so much effort into its AI system to create a world that can exist without your input. In most shooters, gameworlds spring into action the second you crash your spaceship, bungee out of your helicopter, or decide that *Daikatana's* first level couldn't possibly be as annoying as you remember it. Monsters are lined up from weakest

Irrational went so far as to hire a full-time water programmer – now, that's dedication.

"IRRATIONAL IS PLANNING TO TAKE SHOCK 2'S DESIGN PRINCIPLES TO UNPRECEDENTED DEPTHS"



If we met that thing, we'd probably just die as well.

to strongest, and all you have to do is blast your way through.

"In most FPSs," Levine laughs, "the world is just a long, extended corridor. Monsters are waiting to jump out at you. We're busting open all those old, hoary clichés of the genre. Our goal was to create a place that isn't built for you. In *BioShock*, this is a world on its own terms. It's not a carnival fun-ride; it's a place where people go about their business, and have interesting relationships with you and other inhabitants. And that's why we call it an ecology. Learning about this ecology and how these relationships work is a big part of the game. Also, for pretty much every AI in the game, the player has a way to turn their role around. For instance, if you use plasmids, you can make the Big Daddy think you're a Little Sister, or make a Little Sister think you're a Big Daddy."

AS YOU MAKE your way through Rapture, those 'plasmids' become more important. Essentially devices that enhance your abilities, they're not dissimilar to the augmentation canister system in *Deus Ex*. "Using plasmids," Levine says, "the player can genetically modify himself in to get superhuman powers. You can use a set of plasmids, and you can only have one set at a time. Some are dedicated to making him better with his weapons. Some are psionic powers. They're similar to the stat system used in *System Shock 2*, but you're free to change them out at plasmid stations. They're like vending machines – this is a world where if you're not happy with how you look, about how strong you are, or the size of your Johnson, you go to these Plasmi-Quik vending machines, and buy some new genetic product. And you load out the vending machines in one use. So once you've loaded your plasmids out, you have to wait till you find the next vending machine or spend a huge amount of the game's resources to switch them again."

Story-wise, these plasmids come from Adam, the resource for which Little Sisters are hungry. And Adam is the main cause of Rapture's downfall. Levine says that Adam started all the good and the bad in Rapture. "It's genetic material that turns any cell into a stem-cell so you can modify it to become a different kind of cell. And in this capitalist utopia, there was no government restriction on scientific research, and so it took off. Imagine something that could make you better, funnier, smarter, faster… Would that be an appealing thing? It's like in professional sports with the steroids – if the other guy's taking it, you've gotta take more. And if he's taking more, you've got to take even more. *BioShock*'s about what happens to you while you're doing that."

The game's narrative will focus on how a consumer drug ended up leading a utopian society to mass-narcissism, and its eventual collapse. Does Levine feel there's an anti-commercialist message in there? "No," he muses, "it's more about extremism. Extremism in any system isn't good. Look, I'm a capitalist. I own a videogame company. I sold my company to a major corporation. I'm hardly a Bolshevist in the woods, but I think any system taken to the extreme can be dangerous. There's lots of different philosophies in the world of Rapture. That's the ultimate danger of the ultimate ideology system – the assumption that ideology can never be wrong. And that's what happens to Rapture. Nobody stops and says, 'You know, maybe we're going a little far with this.' And we want to put the player in the position of, well,

GREY AREAS

BioShock won't have you making the usual binary choices, *Knights Of The Old Republic*-style, in which the only options are good and evil; the game offers almost limitless ways of tackling obstacles. "It's always about empowering the player and letting him surprise the designer," Levine reveals. "Let him experience the world and solve the problems around him in a way that's improvisational. Give him a broad range of tools and ask, 'Hey, how do you want to solve this problem?' And what that requires of us the designers is to give the players an interesting tool-set. So in *BioShock* you have guns, mutating powers, machines you're willing to hack, and all this other great stuff. And you need a world that responds to that. That's really hard work. We've done so much work with AI in this game. We worked a lot on the relationship between the AIs – not only do they react interestingly to you, but they also react with each other. And because they all have their own agendas, scenarios occur that we can never predict. And at the end of the day, that's what I think it's all about. If you go back to the days of *Zork* and *King's Quest*, designers knew every moment that could happen in the game. Irrational's goal is that we will know less and less and less of what the user's experience is going to be."

what are his choices? He can judge the choices others made, but what choices will he make?"

SINCE SHOCK 2 featured armour, rumours have been circulating that you can wear more than just your day-to-days in *BioShock*. And if the customisation system we mentioned could be utilised with protection as well as weaponry… let's just say Levine isn't far off when he calls *BioShock*, "the deepest shooter ever made". Sadly, he can't comment on rumours at this point. "I have my corporate masters telling me what I can and can't say," he laughs. "I've often made the mistake in the past of going, 'Oh, hold on! Let me get the design document and I'll read it to you'. I've got to keep my mouth shut."

One thing he can discuss – and that wowed all who saw *BioShock* in action at E3 – is the graphics engine. It's a much-tweaked version of Epic's Unreal Engine 3, and Irrational's making sure that Rapture's leaking water will be some of the most frighteningly realistic H2O you've ever seen in a game. "When people saw it," Levine smiles, "they were blown away. And, for us, it's not about making an effect for the sake of it. Just like in *System Shock 2*, which had you on a spaceship – and there was that feeling of isolation – *BioShock* is underwater. With the water effects, we want to remind you: maybe you want to build a utopia at the bottom of the ocean, but maybe the bottom of the ocean doesn't want the utopia. And the feeling that the ocean's essentially drowning the city as you go through the game is hugely important to us. To get an emotional effect across, we hired a full-time water programmer, and people at E3 were gasping, not only at the aesthetics, but at the feeling that this place is coming apart at the seams."

The other aesthetic feature that impressed was *BioShock*'s visual style. Combining art deco with Jules Verne-esque sci-fi imagery, this level of graphical creativity hasn't been seen since *Grim Fandango*. "From an artistic perspective," Levine recalls, "I spent a lot of time just walking around New York, going to the Empire State Building, and seeing the architecture of the period. I love the boldness of it. It almost says, 'Hey, God, I'm man, and I count in this world, and I can do anything!' And I love that. It's forward thinking. Ayn Rand's philosophy – *Atlas Shrugged* – is similar to the architecture. 'Man is the most important thing, and untethered man can do almost everything.' We hold ourselves back, in Rand's opinion, because of charity and altruism – which she sees as the greatest crime against humanity. There are some really interesting things in her philosophy, but, like with everything, there are people who take it too far. That's what *BioShock*'s about."

Of course, other than rampant individualism and Thirties-style architecture, *BioShock* is and always will be about scaring the jellied eel out of you. Through its use of an oppressive atmosphere, creepy NPCs, frantically makeshift weaponry, and sophisticated visuals, Irrational's title looks like it's going to be the scariest shooter since, well, *System Shock 2*. We may not want to live in a drowning wreck of a city in real life, but on our computers and in our living rooms *BioShock* should be a dream come true.

■ Pressing buttons and flicking switches is one way to handle situations. The other is shooting things.

"PEOPLE AT E3 WERE GASPING AT THE FEELING THAT THIS PLACE IS COMING APART AT THE SEAMS"

REVIEWS



THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.







Were it not for the intolerable lag that seems to have wormed its way into the multi-player, *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* would have been a far more satisfying experience.

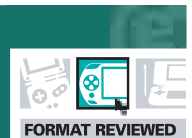
If the multi-player wasn't such a let down, this excellent game would have been amazing, and we would have given it a higher score. Maybe.



Flame-Foot Man's takes to the ring along with all your other favourites from down the *Tekken* ages.

TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

SONY'S PORTABLE PUGILIST MAKES AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
1 September

PLAYERS
1-2

It has become somewhat of an unwritten law to complain about control upon embarking on a PlayStation Portable review. And with good reason – so many of the PlayStation2 games that have been shoehorned onto the portable system have suffered because of the machine's lack of buttons or second analogue. And so it is with great pleasure and a smattering of relief that we announce that *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* is a perfect PSP fit. No problems, no compromises – it's *Tekken*, exactly how it should be. Four buttons, four limbs, combos, juggles and superb characters.

Familiarity can be a very comforting thing, and as such the first foray into *Dark Resurrection's* Story mode instantly conjures up memories of ten-string combos, throw counters and unblockable attacks. A 30-strong cast of *Tekken* heroes past and present decorates the Character Select screen, so anyone with a particular fondness for Roger or Mokojin will be more than satisfied, but it's the two new combatants that have sparked our interest. First up is Dragunov, a Spetsnaz soldier and master of MMA-style combat. Imagine Matt Hughes of UFC fame's fighting style on an anime antagonists' body, and you'll have a clearer picture. His move set consists of stiff kicks, quick punches and various takedown manoeuvres and submissions; very much a ground-and-pound fighter and an indication of Namco's awareness of the increasing popularity of Mixed Martial Arts in the West.

The second new face entering the fray is Lili, a practitioner of Chinese Wushu and a very technical combatant. With high, rangy kicks, complicated combos and effortless grace, Lili will be the expert's character of choice without doubt. She's nowhere near as immediate as Dragunov, but is still a fine addition to an incredibly strong roster, and an excuse for Namco to jam another long-legged, short-skirted female into the mix. It makes for the strongest *Tekken* roster yet, with more than enough choice for any fighter's chosen style, be they a practitioner of the 'rush' technique or a more thoughtful defensive player.

So, all's well in Tekken Land? Well, yes, but only if you're intending to play solo. The Arcade and Story modes are excellent, and the game itself plays almost identically to *Tekken 5*, which is no bad thing. However, as soon as the Wi-Fi LAN is switched to 'on', *Dark Resurrection's* major fault immediately rears its ugly head. Lag – tolerable occasionally, but not when it comes to fighting games. One-on-one ad-hoc matches are crippled by terrible slowdown. Its severity changes from match to match, but there's rarely a bout without it.

FAQs

Q. HOW ARE THE GRAPHICS?
Absolutely excellent – a PSP triumph.

Q. AND THE NEW CHARACTERS?
Very cool, although not hugely different from anyone else on the roster.

Q. CAN I PLAY ONLINE?
Yes you can, although it's lag city.



■ New combatant Dragunov is a master of Russian martial art, Sambo. It's effectively UFC-style fighting.

■ The world's cheapest fighter ever™, Eddie Gordo, makes a welcome return.

KEEP BOWLIN'

***Tekken Bowling* is brilliant. In fact, almost every bowling mini-game in existence has been brilliant, but do those games allow you to throw Heihachi headfirst into the pins? No, they don't. Using the same placement/angle/spin mechanic that has appeared in every bowling game ever, *Tekken Bowling* is a tremendous way to lose a couple of hours with mates in a 'pass the PSP' session. It also shows that Namco has thought about the platform and provided a fun aside that actually makes use of it, it's just a shame that this effort hadn't gone into making the multi-player worth playing.**

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

WI-FI WOES: The whole point of *Tekken: Dark Resurrection's* is the multi-player, but it sorely lets the game down. Plagued by lag, it is less a tense tactical battle and more a button mash up. A damned shame.

Obviously, a fighting game which requires split-second timing and micro-precision placement cannot be fully exploited when the game's frame rate is so erratic – just look at *DOA4* on Xbox Live. Therefore, instead of the considered encounters that make *Tekken 5* on PlayStation2 so enjoyable, we're left with a descent into button bashing, which is far from ideal. It's testament to the quality of the game itself that these PlayStation Portable-mashing battles are still fairly entertaining.

By failing on this most crucial of fronts, however, Namco has spoiled *Tekken's*, and indeed all one-on-one beat-'em-ups' raison d'être: competition. Although playing against solid computer AI is fun and reasonably fulfilling, it can never match the base thrills of an intense human rivalry. As if to compensate, the inclusion of a comprehensive Kumite-style mode, entitled Tekken Dojo, is most welcome. A sprawling campaign set across numerous element-themed dojos, players are pitted against ghosts of real *Dark Resurrection* players, and take part in round-robin tournaments to improve their overall rankings. A ranked up character can be taken into multi-player – for better or worse – and can be customised with money earned through victories. It's not particularly original or spectacularly executed, but is entirely necessary to adding value to an otherwise limited package. Many an hour can be whiled away building up your favourite combatant's ranking or dressing him or her in Day-Glo Lycra, and you'll create your own rivalries with CPU-controlled nemeses.

So, despite its obvious shortcomings, *Tekken Dark Resurrection* is an excellent game. The conversion is spot on, the graphics, sound and control are superb, and short bursts of the single-player are a joy. It's such a shame, then, that the multi-player is a let down, as a smooth Wi-Fi *Tekken* would be hard to beat. Nevertheless, this is still the premier beat-'em-up on PSP, and another fine example of just how powerful Sony's handheld can be when in the right hands. Sadly, it falls short of its home console brethren.

VERDICT 7/10

A FINE EFFORT WITH DISAPPOINTING MULTI-PLAYER



■ *Tekken 5's* newbie Fei Long is as hard as ever. One for the novices to use.



■ All the old *Tekken* characters return, including perennial games™ favourite old man, Wang.

CIVCITY: ROME

LOOK UPON MY WORKS, YE MIGHTY, AND DESPAIR!

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
TakeTwo

DEVELOPER
Firefly Studios

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4/AMD Athlon XP, 512MB RAM, 64MB graphics, 16-bit sound card

We never thought we'd say this about a city management game, but *CivCity: Rome* needs more stats. Perhaps we've been spoilt by the profusion of filters, guidelines and obsessive highlighting that grace more helpful, eager-to-please micro-management games, but we at least expect to be able to have buildings of the same type pointed out to us. *CivCity: Rome* does not make things easy for you in this respect – forcing you to keep track of what you've built, where you've built it and what needs to be done next with very little aid from easily accessible stats and filters. Its staunch unhelpfulness is occasionally frustrating. In the context of such a rich and lovingly made city builder, though, having to do so much work for your rewards is somehow forgivable.

CivCity: Rome is the result of a collaborative effort between *Civilization* creator Firaxis which took up an advisory role on the project, and Firefly Studios, known for its castle-building simulations in the *Stronghold* series. *Civilization*'s influence can be seen chiefly in the Research Trees and Wonder Construction; the actual city building is entirely Firefly's own. Encompassing buildings from the lowliest hovels and farms to villas, coliseums, gladiatorial training schools, wineries, aqueducts and splendorous temples of the civilised Roman Empire, your cities will eventually sprawl over the entire map, taking up every inch of space available with glistening marble. We say eventually because you will almost certainly spend a good portion of your first few hours with the game slumped in front of the Mission Failed screen, beating your fists against the table and moaning 'Why? What did I do wrong?' as you sob over your failed settlement. Due to its lack of guidance, it's often difficult to tell exactly how you're going wrong at first in *CivCity Rome*; developing a sense for it takes time and foresight.

Campaign mode is clearly intended to ease you into the game, although unfortunately the actual effect is restriction as opposed to gradual empowerment. It keeps most of the buildings locked early on, even those essential to your citizens' happiness, meaning that you'll inevitably reach the stage in the middle of the early campaigns where your citizens are pouring out of the city just because the game has decided that you're not allowed to build any temples or statues or bakeries yet. Thanks. Later, though, once the majority of the buildings are available to use and abuse as you wish, the game becomes a very well-paced and rewarding exercise.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY BUILDINGS?
Over 50. Most of which you won't be able to use on most maps.

Q. HOW HARD IS IT?
It's a proper challenge, especially on the harder missions – starting out is always a difficult job.

Q. HOW MANY DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGY TREES?
Um… lots? We think there are nine, but they branch off so much it's tricky to tell.

GLORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE



BETTER THAN



WORSE THAN



ROME: TOTAL WAR

FINGERPRINT

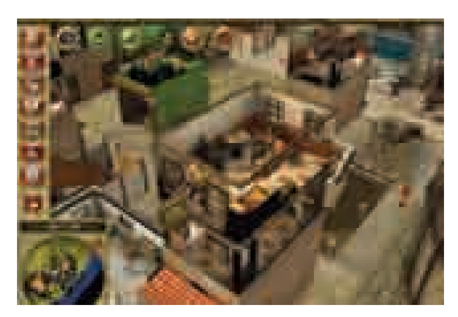
games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

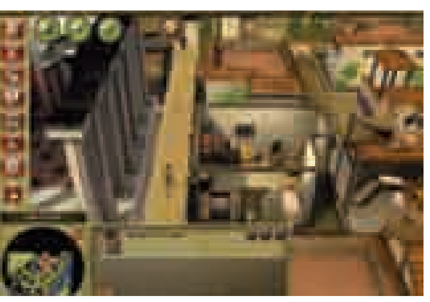
ROMAN CRED: Although hardly representative of the way Rome was actually built, *CivCity: Rome*'s historical respect and comparable accuracy are commendable.



Sea towns are often the hardest to feed and finance.



The creator of *Civilization*, Firaxis, was used in an advisory capacity, and its influence can be seen throughout.



Not everyone needs a house, which is lucky as some of the buildings take up silly amounts of space.

There's a definite two-tiered structure to a typical mission. The initial stages require immense thrift and the balancing of the needs of your fledgling society with the expensive but necessary business of setting up trade and tax income. Later on it's a case of frantically constructing new buildings and amenities to provide for the needs of your enormous population – without a care in the world for the expense – funded by the taxes from luxurious domiciles and a massive trade empire. Although missions might seem repetitive – almost always it's a case of constructing yet another city from the ground up, with slightly different resources available each time – the sense of reward that comes from careful investment and the sight of a wealthy, happy and well-run city is as great as in any city management game we've played.

What really elevates this game above just your usual enjoyable, well-made city-builder, though, is its attention to detail. As Firefly has been keen to emphasise throughout *CivCity*'s development, it's possible to zoom right into the lives and even the houses and workplaces of your town's citizens. There's also a giant interactive Roman encyclopaedia that pops up occasionally in specific contexts, which is as entertaining and accurate an endeavour as we've seen since *Age Of Empires* (although *Empires'* encyclopaedia couldn't really be described as 'amusing'). Being able to zoom right in on everything from the baths to the hovels to the goat farms, and have a peek inside brings the game's Roman cities to life, and though it's a little ridiculous to suggest that it breeds an attachment to your citizens, it does make your city significantly more interesting, especially when you're at a bit of a loose end for once.

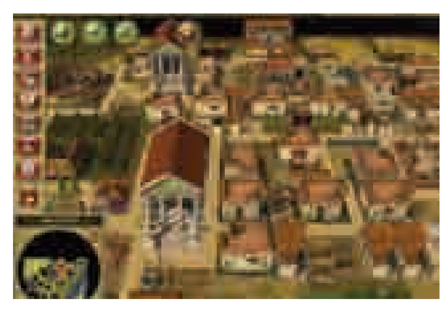
There are a few things about *CivCity: Rome* that are a bit obtuse. Having to click on individual houses to see whether they're in range of a bathing spa is irritating when you should be able to click on the bathhouse itself to see what houses are in range. You can't move buildings except houses, so if you place something expensive in a slightly wrong place there's nothing you can do about it except delete it and build it again, and you get none of your money back. Similarly, rapid expansion combined with the game's habit of keeping buildings locked can mean that there's simply no room for further vital buildings unless you destroy and rebuild an entire sector of it at immense cost.

Campaign can take a while to get going, and failure is sometimes sudden and a bit random, and there's little room for choice in the type of commerce that the city you build takes part in – you just have to work with what you're given. But *CivCity: Rome* is a very good city management game nonetheless, and genuinely offers something new to a genre whose form is now long established.

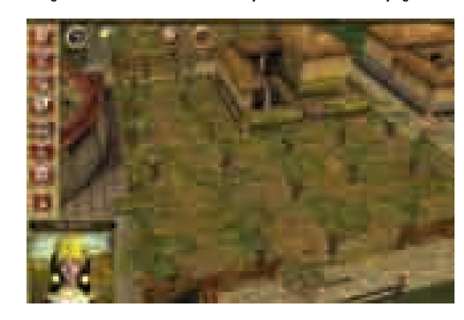


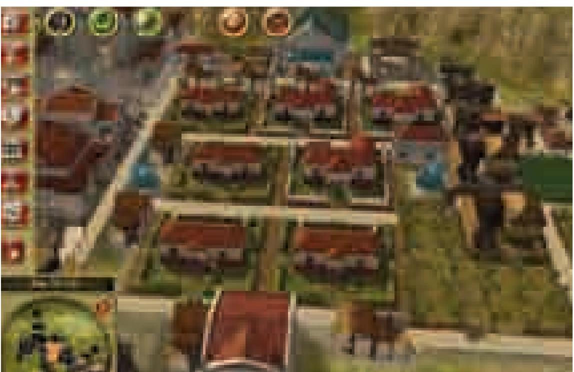
A DAY IN THE LIFE

Citizens' time is balanced between their work and home (if they have one), depending how much free time you allocate them. Citizens who don't have houses sleep at work, and you don't need to house everyone – a relief as bigger residences take up a lot of space. You can follow a citizen around all day if there's nothing else to do in the city, watch him collect things to bring to his house in order to attain a higher standard of living, and follow him back to his family abode after a long day as a tunic maker or fisherman. Or you can just peek into the bathhouses.

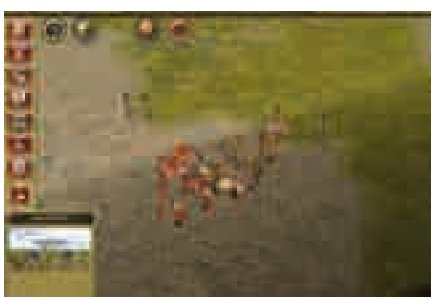


We reached the stage where all our houses wanted to upgrade, but the game wouldn't let us build what they needed to do so. Annoying.





This lovely affluent district is the result of absolutely HOURS of seriously hard graft.



Unfortunately, this is about as spectacular as the battles get. We yearned for *Rome: Total War*.

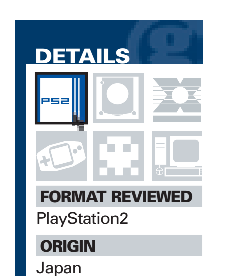


You have to start selling slaves to fund the luxurious lives of your richer citizens. Sadly there's no choice about this.

KING OF FIGHTERS NEOWAVE

NOTHING LIKE A MEXICAN WAVE, APPARENTLY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ignition

DEVELOPER
SNK Playmore

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2



It's a sad truth that every chick has to leave the nest eventually. If you'll take a moment to humour an analogy that compares SNK's ongoing 2D beat-'em-up series with things with wings and beaks, this little birdie in particular had been sitting in its comfortable Neo Geo nest for some ten years before the arcade version of *Neowave* changed everything. And so, just as *King Of Fighters* waved goodbye to the ageing Neo Geo hardware and moved onto the Atomiswave system board for the first time, we give a wry smile and a half-hearted wave to probably the worst analogy this magazine has ever seen and welcome in the rest of the review. Trust us, it gets a whole lot better from here on in. No more bird references. Promise.

The first, and arguably most important, feature that you notice when starting *King Of Fighters Neowave* is the choice of three different fighting styles, similar to games like *Street Fighter Alpha 3* or *Capcom Vs SNK 2*. Super Cancel does exactly what it sounds like it should, allowing you to buffer Special moves and Desperation moves into one another for showy combos and more damage. It also allows most recovery techniques, making this the game's equivalent of a 'basic' style. Guard Break mode is for the more technical player, allowing a powerful Guard Crush move and *Garou's* Just Defense system while MAX2 mode is for those that like to do big damage, sacrificing many of the defensive moves and recoveries for a recharging power gauge and each character's devastating MAX2 super. Like *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, all three modes have their merits, and while you will more than likely stick with a favourite, the other two will always lend themselves to playing differently or getting the most out of particular characters.

The fighter roster itself is nothing if not impressive, almost toppling *Marvel Vs Capcom 2's* stacked line-up. There is a real sense of variety, and almost every familiar face from SNK's trademark series makes the cut – the cast benefits further from a sense of integrity created by there being no 'novelty' characters which seem so common in modern 2D fighters. Individuality is rife and if you were to try and sit down and memorise all the different moves and supers, it would probably take longer than it took to put the entire game together. In addition, the three different play styles also give the impression of a much wider array of characters. Even the same character will feel different and require an alternative approach

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CHARACTERS?
Around 50 in total – 43 off the bat, with several unlockables to boot. A great roster, really.

Q. WHAT'S ITS 'THING'?
The three modes of play – Super Cancel, Guard Break and MAX2. Each is worthwhile and allows different play styles.

Q. IS KEN IN IT?
This question is wrong on so many levels. Stop picking such woefully dirty characters, you scrub. And no, obviously he isn't. Jeez…

■ Sure, the Xbox pad is fine, but the PS2 pad is a different story.





■ Despite having huge range, Whip is actually not considered a 'cheap' character. Not like Ken from the *Street Fighter* series – he's dirty.



SONIC BOOM

With classic *Street Fighter* themes and *Soul Blade's* wonderful score still ringing in our ears, it's no surprise that nothing can compare. But from the odd fixation with funky jazz-rap Character Select screens (a crime of which *Neowave* is guilty) to the downright bizarre – the Robert Miles rip-off in Rock's stage of *Garou*, for example – no one does it right any more and SNK is possibly the worst for it. *Neowave* has a typically poor array of tunes, and while the focus is on the fighting, the audio feels like an afterthought, like there was just enough money left in the development budget to hire a dodgy rapper with a Casio keyboard.



Now that's what we call a respectable rosta of characters.

in each style, meaning that you will see offensive characters get more reserved and vice versa through experimentation.

The matches themselves are pretty much traditional *King Of Fighters* fare – three-on-three battles with no switching until a combatant falls, whereby his or her replacement is called in after a brief spell of loading. There is also the option to play single battles, but this deservedly takes a back seat to the more interesting team battles which are the real staple of the series. Super attacks have really been toned down, which will prove a love/hate scenario depending upon your attitude towards them. While they are still powerful, many supers grant little or no immunity from opponents' blows, and this means that you can expect to trade damage or be hit clean out of supers a lot more than in similar games. It is frustrating at times, but, in its defence, it does push the player towards more frugal use of specials through hit confirms and simple combos.



This is what happens when you fight Mr Ryan King. You lose very quickly.

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

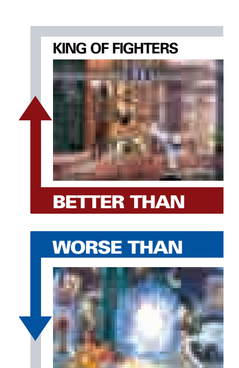
FINISH HIM: If you can find anyone still willing to take an original Xbox game online, *Neowave* offers full online play to determine who is the King of Fighters. Here's a clue – it's not you.

Throw Live play into the mix and you have a pretty decent little package for 30 notes – an interesting and complete fighter that deserves the attention of anyone who enjoys the delights of two-dimensional fighting. In essence, the game is little more than 'King Of Fighters 2002' but with a little more visual polish, a couple of additional characters and a few new elements, but then that's all any fighting sequel ever tends to be, especially if you exclude that oh-so popular third dimension. It's not going to topple the likes of *Third Strike, Garou* or *Capcom Vs SNK 2* from their pedestals, but regardless *Neowave* still offers a fantastic interlude game for fanatical players of any other 2D beat-'em-ups, and a reassuring pat on the back for series devotees.



VERDICT 7/10

SOLID STUFF – THE STRONGEST KOF GAME IN YEARS





Iori is still a firm favourite of ours. Well, Rick likes him lots.



The three different styles provide suitable combat variations.



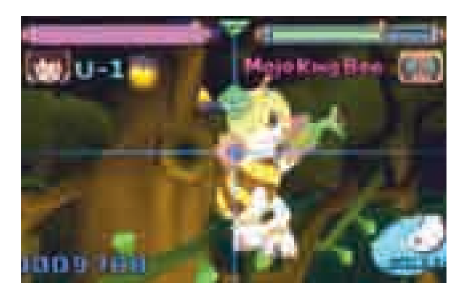
As we said, Rick uses Iori all the time, so we saw this situation quite a bit.



A game that oozes character like this can just about get away with not being quite as technically superior as other examples of the genre.



The 'shark' level is all defence, and has proved to be an impossible barrier for many players.



Hopefully *Gitaroo Man Lives!* will receive the recognition it deserves this time round. With any luck someone will buy a copy.

GITAROO MAN LIVES!

PUMA! GITAROO!



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Koei

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
September

PLAYERS
1-2

You may find it slightly strange that games™ has decided to offer up two of its hallowed review pages for *Gitaroo Man Lives!*. After all, it's little more than a handheld port of one of the team's favourite rhythm-action games. But, and this is a crucial 'but', the original *Gitaroo Man* arrived prior to **games™**'s inception – we have never officially cast our critical eye over one of the most revered 'Bemani' games ever created. So, what better time than now – the release of *Gitaroo Man Lives!* on PSP? What better time indeed?

For anyone who has never experienced *Gitaroo Man* (and there are a lot of you – the game did not do particularly well in this territory), it's a distinctly unique take on the rhythm-action genre. Playing as a young boy named U-1, you gain the power of 'Gitaroo Man' when your dog Puma hurls the fabled Gitaroo at you. Suddenly U-1 is transformed into a Sentai-type warrior (think *Viewtiful Joe* or *Power Rangers*) and can use his Gitaroo to vanquish enemies in one-on-one musical showdowns. It's never been the most 'normal' of genres.

Using a combination of the analogue nub and the circle button, players have to follow lines of notes, matching their angle with the nub and pressing circle in time. It sounds confusing, and at first it is, but after a few brief moments of befuddlement, it all starts to fall into place. In actual fact, it recreates the feeling of playing guitar surprisingly well, especially considering the control method is so disconnected from the real-life action. Later stages will have heads rocking as in *Guitar Hero*. And, as battles follow the beat-'em-up staple of depleting energy meters, you will also be asked to defend your opponent's attacks, whereby the control system changes to a more traditional Simon-Says-style rhythmic button bash. The game combines the two systems splendidly, blending long Gitaroo segments with frantic defending to joyous effect.

Each opponent you encounter is wonderfully realised. From the trumpet-blasting P-funk bumble bee, Mojo King, to the maraca-shaking Sambone Trio (three Hispanic skeletons), the characterisation is consistently excellent. Also, as every opponent uses a different musical instrument as a weapon, the game's soundtrack is wickedly varied. Flitting from J-pop to Eighties Goth metal via dub reggae, finally finishing up on a riotous Radiohead-inspired epic (*Just*, if you were wondering).

Gitaroo Man Lives! is near impossible to fault, and entirely integral to the game's charm. It only takes a brief spin of the new PSP-only duet tracks (see I've Got You, Babe…) to realise just how good the original soundtrack is. Who can forget the first time they heard U-1 strum the hauntingly beautiful *Legendary Theme*

FAQs

Q. THE SAME GAME?
Yes, there are a couple of new multi-player songs, but it's the same story.

Q. HOW DOES THE PSP HOLD UP?
The nub is perfect for Gitaroo; only the widescreen lets it down slightly on Master mode.

Q. HOW HARD IS IT?
Seasoned Bemani players will breeze through; novices may not get past Level 4. Same as ever…

TAIKO NO TATSUJIN PORTABLE



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



GITAROO MAN

The great man himself, Mojo King Bee, sure plays a mean trumpet.

The suit and helmet are typical of a Japanese Sentai. It's a very Eastern game, but the music is far more varied than you might think.

while cuddling up on the beach? Truly one of the most heart-warming moments in gaming history – up there with *Ouendan's Over The Distance*. It's no surprise that they both come from the same development team.

It's this heart, this innate personality that *Gitaroo Man* exudes that makes it such a classic game. Story is not something that rhythm-action need concern itself with usually, but *Gitaroo Man's* is so genuinely triumphant – for all its Japanese idiosyncrasies – that it makes playing through the single-player game a much more fulfilling experience than many other examples of the genre. In technical terms, it may fall behind the likes of *Frequency* when delivering pure Bemani thrills, but its character more than makes up for it.

However, despite the game's unabashed excellence, it's not without fault. Obviously, owners of the original will likely baulk at the thought of paying full price for a game they already own – the two new tracks do not justify the price point. Also, PSP's widescreen hampers the Defend sections. As the attacks derive from the extremities of the screen, the 16:9 ratio means you have less time to react. This makes Master mode EVEN harder than it was on PS2, but this is in no way damaging enough to spoil the product as a whole. And, as if by compromise, PSP's nub actually improves the *Gitaroo Man* experience. When at full tilt, the nub is even more accurate than a DualShock 2 stick, so you're far less likely to misjudge the angle of a guitar section. Good stuff.

To not like *Gitaroo Man* is to not like gaming. It may not be the absolute pinnacle of rhythm-action, but its charming mix of sublime music, enchanting characters and highly enjoyable mechanics make for a wonderful, albeit short-lived gaming experience. Heartily recommended to anyone who has yet to spend time in Puma's company, and anyone wishing to improve their master level ranking while on the road need look no further. A veritable triumph.

VERDICT 8/10

A FINE PORT OF AN EQUALLY FINE GAME

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

TWO TUNES: Wi-Fi link-up allows two players to go head-to-head in the ever enjoyable Battle mode, and now, exclusive to PSP, the underwhelming Duet mode adds a few more minutes to the game's lifespan.

I'VE GOT YOU, BABE…

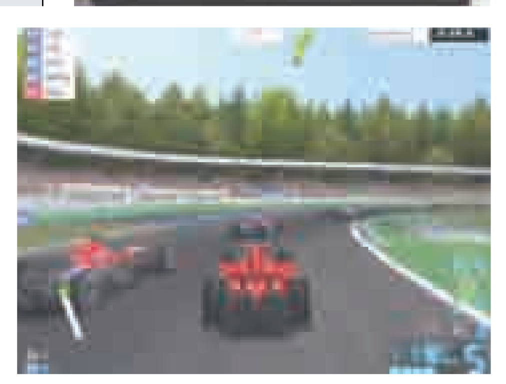
New in *Gitaroo Man Lives!* is Duet mode where two players can join forces to play the two new songs, *Toda Passion* and *Metal Header*. Unfortunately, both of the new tracks are pretty awful. *Passion* is a Latino number that defies its name, sounding more Ricky Martin than Sergio Mendes, and the less said about *Metal Header's* dreadful sub-Chumbawumba cacophony the better. They're still reasonably fun to play through – the mechanics hold strong – but in truth all they really do is advocate the strength of the original soundtrack. They were never going to beat the redux *Legendary Theme*, but unfortunately they barely beat the training level tune. A shame.



The famous *Legendary Theme* is first strummed under this starry sky.



Certain sections of the song allow you to charge your energy meter. Use them wisely.





■ *Formula One '06* is a very blurry game, and not in a good way.



■ Success in races unlocks classic F1 cars to race in – almost worth playing for.

MISSING LINK

WHATS MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

FIRE IT UP: *Formula One '06* needs a heavy injection of 'oomph'. More speed, better visuals, a stronger sense of immersion and a cloth for all the blur.

FORMULA ONE '06

SUCKING THE FUN OUT OF FORMULA ONE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

What more can the videogame industry do to capture the raw, visceral thrills of Formula One? More speed? Better visuals? Clearer sound? A hyper-realistic Cockpit mode á là *PGR3*? These are all questions that Sony's Liverpool outfit must have asked itself during the development of *Formula One '06*. And what do we get upon pulling away from the grid during the opening Grand Prix of the season? Motion blur. Ugly, badly implemented motion blur.

Yes, it would seem the F1 game has hit something of a rut in recent years. On current-gen technology there's simply nothing more that can be added to the experience outside of statistical updates or a pit-stop mini-game, so we're left with a Vaseline-vat's worth of blur smudged haphazardly over the screen. And unfortunately it's not enough to hide the barebones graphics, uninspiring handling and misguided physics. There's truly (Trulli?) very little to praise.

Just a single race is all it takes before questions start getting raised. Why do the backgrounds look worse than PSOne's *F1 '97*? Why do you have to press X so hard that your thumb cramps after two laps? Why do cars lose all their wheels on impact? And why is it so dull? There are so many racing games available on PS2 – great racing games – that unless you happen to be both an F1 aficionado AND a glutton for punishment, *Formula One '06* is entirely unnecessary.

Despite the general lack of ambition, innovation or inspiration present in *Formula One '06*, a few flourishes save it from utter embarrassment. The commentary – accompanied by the whine of the F1 engines – is pleasantly perfunctory creating an ITV-esque feel. The wealth of gameplay and customisation options will satisfy fans' automotive cravings; Career mode, for example, is sufficiently overwhelming and has a fairly decent bash at recreating the trials and tribulations of an F1 season. You can create a racer, deal with emails, win a place on a team and work your way up the rankings, but when the racing is so weak it matters very little.

Formula One desperately needs the next generation. If handling and statistics have now reached a plateau, the only way the games can improve is visually. As it stands, *Formula One '06* is doing nothing new whatsoever. The two previous years' versions offer the equivalent thrills, and are now available for half the price. The PS3 launch will see a brand-new version of *Formula One* – we heartily recommend waiting for that, otherwise you'll be left with a blurred, ugly mess.

VERDICT 4/10
SERIOUSLY UNINSPIRING STUFF

FORMULA ONE '05

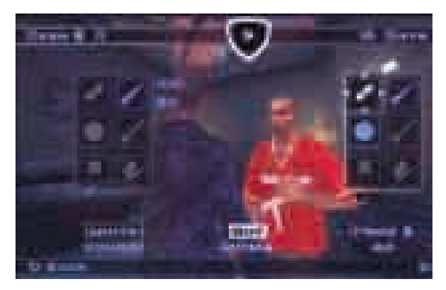


JUST LIKE

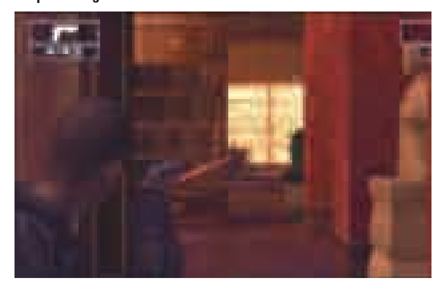
WORSE THAN



GRAN TURISMO 4



Any drugs that you find can be traded on the street for cash to purchase guns and clothes.



The use of cover is imperative to your survival. The laser sight will help draw a bead on the bad guys.



There is a wide variety of weapons from handguns to fully automatic rifles.

MIAMI VICE: THE GAME

AFTER THE LAST ONE, HOW BAD CAN IT BE?



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

DEVELOPER
Sierra Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
2

Memories of *Miami Vice* are usually of technicolour sunsets, pastel suits with rolled-up sleeves, Don Johnson when he didn't have to beg for work, and as of last year a truly terrible PlayStation2 game. Looking back now, there is little evidence of what made the show so groundbreaking, and the game simply focused on the tackiness and camp visuals, coming a cropper as a result. In a clear attempt to rescue the legacy of the show, Michael Mann is treating us to a contemporary filmic update of *Miami Vice* later this year and, true to form, the game industry is right behind it with yet another licence.

Gamers are likely to be wary of any game that sports the *Miami Vice* brand, but we would all do well to reassess our prejudices as Vivendi's new effort is a vast improvement. Playing as either Crockett or Tubbs – or both in the hugely satisfying Co-op mode – you can blast your way through a grittily realistic Miami underworld in an effort to topple the city's drug barons. As an undercover agent you will need to visit dealers, buying and selling narcotics to make money. The market value of each of the six available drugs changes from mission to mission, so buying tactically can reap considerable rewards. Through your snitches, drugs can also be used to trade for mission secrets – the whereabouts of enemies, health packs, and CCTV shutdown codes – that can help you when the going gets tough.

Missions are largely focused on killing everything that moves and finding illegal substances – a simple set-up, but fun nonetheless. Aiming is very much in the style of *Resident Evil 4*. Pressing the right shoulder button stops your movement and zooms the camera in tight to your shoulder while a laser sight helps you to successfully target enemies. As a man alone, the use of cover is vital for safe passage through the missions, and you can mount pretty much anything in sight using the left shoulder button. The combat is very well done, though the number of enemies does stay the same whether you play alone or with a friend, making one too easy or the other too difficult depending on your viewpoint.

The cover-and-shoot gameplay mechanic does get tiresome after a while, and the simplistic speedboat levels fail to add some much-needed variety. Like many PSP products, *Miami Vice* feels like a console game, but without the power to give you the full package. Even so, this is a highly polished action title with a Co-op mode that should provide hours of gameplay after completion. If only for the want of better competition, *Miami Vice: The Game* is one of the better options available for PSP, and a successful shot at redemption for the brand.



VERDICT 7/10
GOOD IDEAS, NICELY EXECUTED



MIAMI VICE

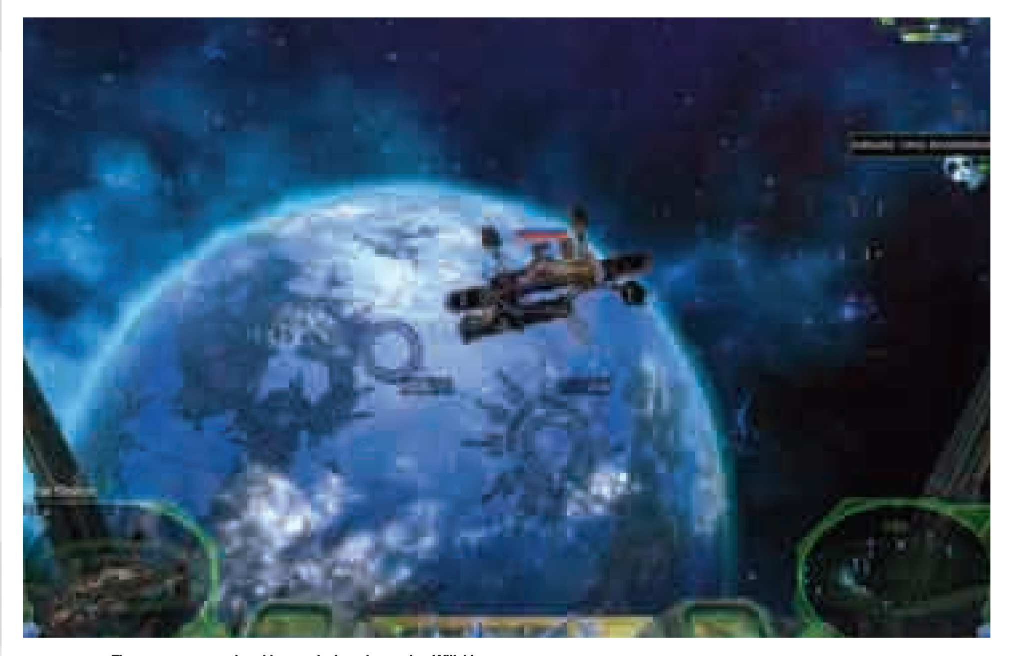


BETTER THAN

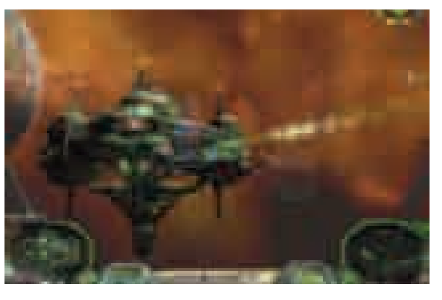
WORSE THAN



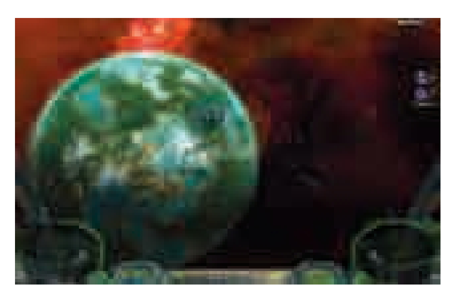
SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR



There are moments when this game looks truly stunning. Will this be enough to welcome a new generation of space combatants?



That one and only trade station in every system – at least they sometimes vary in the looks department.



Sometimes, this feels like such a lonely game; there's never any respite from all the space travel.

DARKSTAR ONE

A MODERN RENAISSANCE, OR TEN YEARS TOO LATE?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
CDV

DEVELOPER
Ascaron

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
11 August

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Intel/AMD 1.6GHz, Windows XP, 512MB RAM, DX9 Compatible, 128MB Graphics Card, 6GB HDD space

There was a time when space-flight games would pop up on PC every couple of weeks. It's a sub-genre that's produced a number of classics – *Elite* and *Wing Commander* spring to mind – but today, space settings seem to have become something of a cliché; outer-space combat is more commonplace in strategy games than action titles. *DarkStar One*, as a modern return to space combat, is sure to ignite a spark of longing in former fans of the genre, with its tense dogfighting and wide-open, gorgeous, star-specked backdrops.

Anyone who loved *Wing Commander, Privateer* or *TerraNova* will revel in the sumptuous graphics and wonder why people ever stopped making space combat simulations. After a while, though, the realisation dawns that *DarkStar One* is actually very rudimentary. Bar the graphics, this is hardly more sophisticated than *Elite*, which was released in 1984. It's story driven, but its linear and badly voice-acted story doesn't even come close to *Wing Commander*'s interactive cinematics. It gives you many different missions, but they all boil down to going out and shooting some ships. If this had been released ten years ago, it would have been lost in a sea of better games that did something more interesting with the genre.

Actually, we're being rather harsh there. *DarkStar One* really isn't a bad game. It does tick all the relevant boxes, bless it, and it really is a reasonably attractive game. You can partake in a little bit of trading, smuggle goods, shoot down pirates or police – although shooting police will just make the whole game extremely difficult for you – and upgrade your ship with capacitors and generators and flux accelerators and energy pulse weapons as well as other useful nuggets of pleasingly nonsensical sci-fi technology. Structurally, it reminds us a bit of *Sid Meier's Pirates*; you're always flitting between ports, always chasing someone or something across a huge world that takes unnecessarily long to traverse.

There are over 300 different star systems in *DarkStar One*. Each comprises of nothing more than a trade station where you can dock and buy things via a menu or embark on a generic take-this-here or blow-this-up mission in order to get some cash, there are also a couple of research stations which you can't land on, and a few asteroids which have nothing in them. All of your time is spent either following people from galaxy to galaxy as part of the plotline; earning money by shooting things; travelling from point A to point B with some kind of cargo; or looking for artefacts with which to upgrade your ship, which involves no challenge whatsoever as the game tells you exactly where they are, and all you have to do is go and fetch them.

FAQs

Q. SO, SCI-FI STORY?
Yes, by a German author, although we must warn you that it's hardly compelling.

Q. 300 DIFFERENT SYSTEMS?
Don't be fooled by the sound bite. They're all the same.

Q. ARE THERE DIFFERENT RACES?
Yep. Human, Klingon-like things called Mortoks, Raptors and three others.

EARTHSIEGE 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WING COMMANDER IV

■ The combat is really good, but once you've shot down 18,000 pirates you'll yearn for something more.

■ Sometimes, these have artefacts hidden in them. The game will tell you immediately if they do, so no exploration is necessary.

The combat is easily the highlight, which is just as well as it comprises about 75 per cent of the game. Joystick-compatible but perfectly workable on a keyboard, *DarkStar One*'s controls are fluid and accessible and have you rolling, boosting and looping amid swarms of enemies within an hour or so as you twirl to avoid missiles with your finger held down on the 'make things explode' button which is conveniently located on the left mouse click.

Energy can be transferred to and from weapons and shields, and shields themselves transferred from front to back on the ship, giving you a good degree of control over fights. Being able to transfer shields to the rear before turning tail and fleeing from pirates while your weapons recharge gives the dogfighting more depth and challenge than just aiming at the guide reticule and holding down the shoot button until everything is dead. This is very good combat – as far as twirling around in zero gravity and shooting things against a lovely planet backdrop goes, *DarkStar One* has it covered.

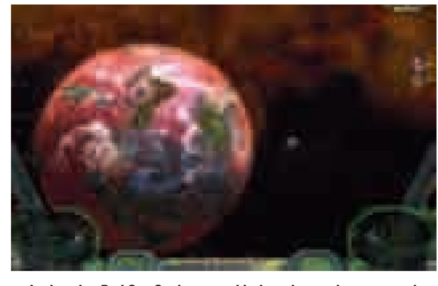
Perhaps we just expect too much from our games these days. As a simple space shooter, *DarkStar One* is fine – well constructed, fun and lovely to look at. But it's difficult to see the point of having 300 systems to visit when they're all exactly the same, difficult to see the point of following the story when it's so uncompelling (the work of German science-fiction writer Claudia Kern has unfortunately suffered in translation), difficult to see the point in partaking in trade or doing anything other than what the missions tell you, because the rewards for diverting are so paltry.

The game's great combat will entertain you for a while, but not for the 20-plus hours that the story requires of you; essentially it's the same five minutes of entertainment repeated over and over again and it quickly becomes wearing and repetitious. If all you want is a simple space-combat game then *DarkStar One* is worth your money, but probably not £30 of it. Go out and get *Wing Commander IV* instead, it doesn't look as nice, but there's far more to it.

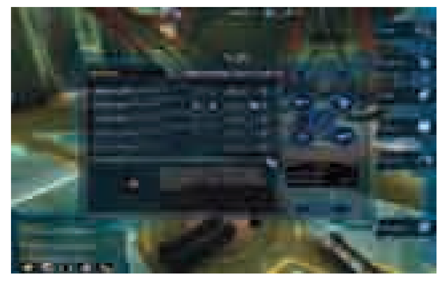
VERDICT 5/10
DOES NOTHING WRONG BUT NOTHING RIGHT

games™
MISSING LINK
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE
VARIETY: Okay, so maybe being able to land on the planets is a bit out of this game's league, but it could at least have had something other than trade stations in just some of the systems…

SHIP OF DREAMS
The 'DarkStar One' of the title is the ship in which you fly throughout the game – an organic evolving ship left in the main character's care by his late father. At first the game promises you that you can upgrade and evolve it however you like, but this soon turns out to be a lie. Collecting artefacts, which are easily located on the map, earns you upgrades for the wings, hull or engines respectively. You can also buy different sorts of weapons and equipment at trade stations. This, though, is customisation in the loosest imaginable sense of the word – all you're doing is buying the best equipment that you're allowed to have at any given point in time.



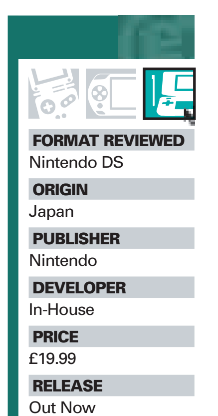
■ Looks-wise *DarkStar One* is acceptable, but when each star system has little for you to actually do, appearance matters little.



■ At various trade stations, you can purchase items to upgrade your ship, as well as other inane sci-fi gadgetry.

APPARENTLY DIPLOMATS' BRAINS ARE HEAVIER THAN SCIENTISTS'

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

Having each weighed our individual brains, and subsequently spent a number of hours matching pairs of animals and adding up trucks, mildly outraged at the suggestion that we have the minds of fashion stylists or diplomats and not Michelangelo (amusingly, one of us actually got 'copywriter', and one of the tests threw up 'film critic', which is pretty close), we can safely conclude that too much brain training is very bad for you. *Big Brain Academy's* Twiglet-esque headmaster doesn't sensibly limit your play per day like the good Prof Kawashima does, meaning you can test yourself for hours if you like. Take it from us: doing so gives you an awful headache.

Big Brain Academy's tasks are slightly less demanding than *Kawashima's*, and certainly easier on the eye. As well as shapes and numbers, it features colourful little cartoon animals to be counted, paired or memorised, and its general humour and presentation give the impression that this was designed for the area of the market that might find *Brain Training* that bit too sober and demanding – namely, the younger end. For those who have been training their brain for some time now, though, *Big Brain Academy* is a little too easy – it didn't take too long for us to get gold medals on each of the game's 15 tasks in Practice mode (bar the one where you have to count American coins – cue copious swearing before happening upon the button that changed them into helpful numbers instead). There's also a distinct lack of graphs and progress charts, which takes a lot of the reward out of training; the whole thing feels like nothing more than a set of mini-games. As it doesn't limit your play over the weeks, it's possible to get very good at them all over no more than a few days, destroying the whole concept of gradual brain improvement.

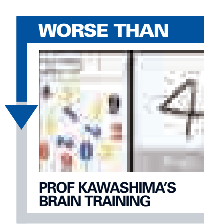
Indeed, it's impossible to shake the feeling that *Big Brain Academy* is little more than a watered-down version of *Train Your Brain*, and so for people who already own the previous game, this is very difficult to recommend. If you found *Kawashima's* presentation too clinical, though, or can think of a younger sibling who needs smartening up, this may well fit the bill. At least there's none of the microphone usage that makes *Train Your Brain* so frustrating ("BLUE! BLUE! IT'S F**KING BLUE!"). Nintendo's *Touch Generations* games will hopefully be taken in a new direction in the near future, but anyone hungry for more *Brain Training* is advised to wait for the sequel rather than invest in this slightly dumbed-down version.



VERDICT 5/10
FOR THOSE TOO SCARED OF KAWASHIMA



'MAKE-U-SMART' PILLS
BETTER THAN

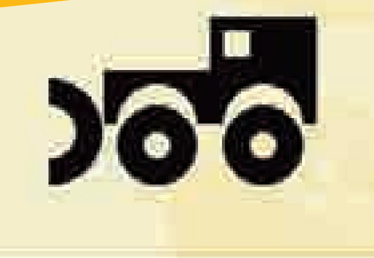


WORSE THAN
PROF KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING



FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MADNESS: The Twiglet headmaster can actually be quite funny – who could forget the immortal line: "SO… MASSIVE! The very sight of a brain like this gets me excited!"



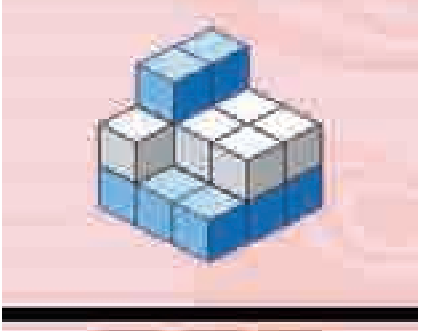


What shapes make up the truck? This is actually MUCH harder than it looks.





This is actually a very big brain weight. On our first go, we got between 500g and 1,000g.





In our opinion, some people just can't perform tasks like this in their heads. Bah.



We never thought our own hands would become our worst enemies.



Without an actual gun, the feeling of shooting point blank is lost.



Poking is definitely easier than shooting. *Point Blank DS* proves this.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SPEED DEMON: There are very few games available that require you to move your hand at the speeds that *Point Blank DS* demands. It actually starts to hurt a little.

POINT BLANK DS

READY… AIM… PROD



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
$29.99

RELEASE
Q4 '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Nintendo DS has provided developers with a great many opportunities. We've already seen the manipulation of the machine's unique features forming some of the most innovative titles to date – *Trauma Center: Under The Knife* springs immediately to mind – but there have also been a fair number of games that have seen the touch screen, stylus and mic forced into play in what can only be described as an 'unnecessary manner'. The problem with *Point Blank DS* is that it manages to fall somewhere between the two.

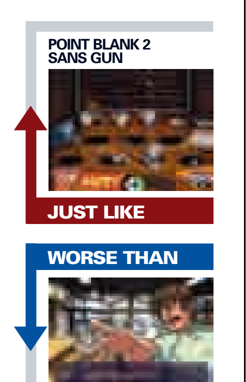
If you know of the *Point Blank* titles and what they are all about then it's easy to figure out how this is going to work: the stylus is the 'gun' and prodding the lower screen is 'firing the gun'. If you're not familiar with the games then we should tell you that the *Point Blank* titles are shooting games and they require some form of gun to play – these guns are generally of the 'light' variety. That last sentence is the cause of the main, and arguably only, fault with *Point Blank DS*. You require a gun. It's a need. A stylus, for all its innovative properties, is not a gun, and as such only manages to remind you how much fun *Point Blank* games were when you did have a gun. Allow us to explain…

The act of simply poking a screen with a stylus is a completely different technique from the skill and accuracy that you use to fire a lightgun. Picking off a small, moving target with one shot is a huge achievement when firing at it from a distance – touching it is not. In order to compensate for this, *Point Blank DS* has upped the number of targets and the speed in which they have to be dealt with – and it just makes the game feel sloppy.

The style of play, on the other hand, is superb – as is always the case with the *Point Blank* series – and the variety of the 'games' here is enough to keep you interested for a fair old while, especially when you consider the whole 'I want the high score' feeling that the title manages to capture. The game also features a *Brain Training*-inspired skill-honing area that will see you improving your reflexes by way of short daily exercises, which is a nice touch. The problem is that it really does seem that the core of the title has been removed, and, thanks to this, thoughts of extended appeal and any sort depth soon become void and *Point Blank* shows itself for the glorified mini-game that it actually is – even more so than any of its forerunners.



VERDICT 5/10
MISSES THE POINT



POINT BLANK 2 SANS GUN

JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN

TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY: THE TAKEOVER

GOOD GAME, LONG TITLE…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Given its roots in some of the world's most dangerous urban areas, hip-hop culture's notorious fascination with violence isn't all that surprising. If the old maxim 'Write what you know' holds any truth, then it would only be natural for a kid growing up in Compton, California, to pass comment on the turbulence of his or her day-to-day existence.

What alienates many from hip-hop, however, is not the presence or description of violence, but rather the unsettling tendency to glorify it. That the effect of artists like Public Enemy and NWA was to enlighten the world to a way of life of which they were previously ignorant is beyond question, but a large part of the hip-hop scene holds no such noble goals, eternally fascinated with bling, bitches and ridiculously exaggerated notions of respect.

Def Jam Fight For NY: The Takeover is the third game from the venerable urban record label, all of which have been rooted in wrestling and street fighting, all of which revel in the very worst of the culture they represent. Your goal is to seize power by being as efficiently violent as possible, protecting your 'rep', and spending all your cash on branded clothes and garish jewellery – it is hip-hop to the very marrow. Far from being a stumbling block, however, this is actually one of the concept's major strengths: those that love the lifestyle can play as their musical heroes, those that don't can viciously pound the likes of Sean Paul and Xzibit to a bloody pulp – either way, you're going to leave satisfied.

Where most games that are developed off the back of a licence tend to be hastily executed cash-ins, the previous *Def Jam* titles have been uncharacteristically well made, highly polished and a lot of fun to play. *The Takeover* happily continues this run of form, taking the basic structure of *Fight For NY* on PlayStation2, adding a handful of new moves, characters and arenas, and leaving us with a pretty strong contender for Best Fighting Game On PSP – if only for the want of stronger competition.

The events of the story pre-date those of *Def Jam Vendetta*, the idea being that *The Takeover* will flesh out the *Def Jam* universe, charting D-Mob's rise to power. This being an EA game, you are able to create your own character with full control over a wide range of – mostly visual – attributes. You can also assign your character one of five fighting styles – street fighting, kickboxing, martial arts, wrestling and submission – which will dictate your strengths, weaknesses and range of moves. As you win fights you'll be awarded development points, which can be used at the

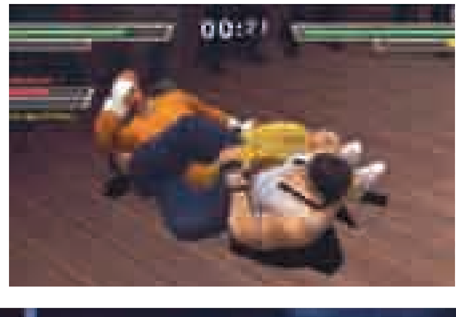
FAQs

Q. HOW DO YOU GET MORE FIGHTS?
You use an apartment as your base. Messages from your homies come through on your machine.

Q. DO THEY SAY ANYTHING ELSE?
Yes, they tell you when new clothing, accessories and tattoo designs become available.

Q. ANYTHING ELSE?
Tailor the soundtrack, change outfits, what more do you want?

Submission is one of the five fighting styles you can choose to specialise in.







If the opponent is collapsed against a structure, you can perform context-sensitive grapples.

FIGHTING DIRTY

In keeping with *The Takeover's* stance on morality and ethics, fighting dirty is greatly encouraged. Kidney punches, eye pokes and throwing sand into the face of your opponent are among a reported 50 questionable tactics that you can access. Knock an opponent to the floor and press the grapple button over their prone body, and your character will straddle their chest. Pressing the punch and kick buttons will then make your character repeatedly punch the opponent's face. Like the majority of moves and holds in the game, this can be countered, but it's still a damn sight easier to beat a man when you're kneeling on his arms.



You will witness some extremely dirty fighting in this *Def Jam* outing.



The character creator allows you to make yourself look this ridiculous.

gym to purchase more moves and level up your character in six different categories. In one of the game's more innovative touches, you can also use your development points to purchase up to two further fighting styles, thereby creating a hybrid fighter. The combination of styles with the level-up facility allows tremendous control over how your character will develop, and the learning curve is just steep enough for you to feel the benefit of every visit to the gym.

Gameplay makes use of all the buttons that PSP has to offer, but is kept satisfyingly simple: triangle, square, cross and circle are kick, punch, grapple and run respectively, while the left shoulder button magnifies attack power and the right blocks. Different sequences of buttons will trigger more moves and combinations, but you'll never need to press more than two buttons at a time, which helps keep the action fast and responsive. Should you fight well, your Heat meter will rise giving you access to your Blazin' moves – suitably acrobatic and powerful attacks that can be purchased from the gym and assigned to the four directions on the D-pad. As the game increases in difficulty, Blazin' moves become very significant in beating your opponents, and the rate that your Heat meter rises can be increased by purchasing clothes, jewellery, tattoos, haircuts and generally being a playa.

The Takeover is perfect handheld fodder: easy to pick up, at its best when played in short bursts and Wi-Fi-ready for a few one-on-ones with your mates. The only potential stumbling block is the material. Any game that so obviously wallows in a culture runs the risk of eliminating part of its potential audience, and how much enjoyment a person can get from *The Takeover* will correspond exactly with how long it takes for all the bling and gangsta stylin' to set their teeth on edge. Until it does, however, this remains a game with enough quality and playability to appeal beyond the boundaries of its subject matter, and even the staunchest of haters couldn't fail to be taken in by all the questionable morals and bloodletting on show.

VERDICT 7/10

GOOD, FUN FIGHTER FOR PSP. ANOTHER DEF JAM WINNER



THE CON

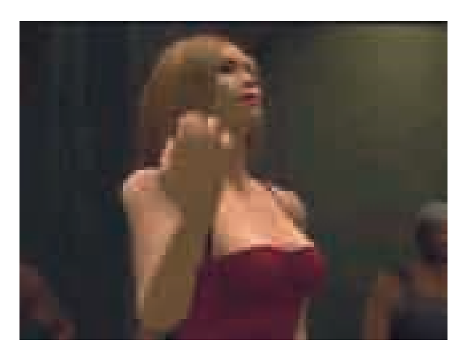


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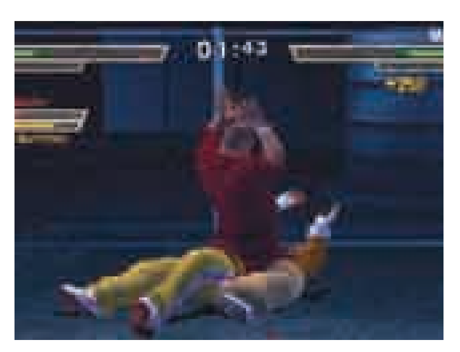
AS GOOD AS



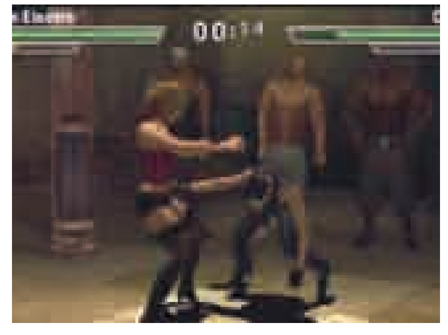
DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY



Win fights outside of Story mode to unlock new characters.



Mounted attacks let you pulverise the enemy before they can recover.



Unlockable characters include the lovely Carmen Electra.

ATELIER IRIS 2: THE AZOTH OF DESTINY

AND THE AWARD FOR MOST INCOMPREHENSIBLE TITLE GOES TO…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
NIS America

DEVELOPER
Gust Inc

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
September (Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

With only a finite number of words in the English language, it stands to reason that the combinations thereof for titles would start to run dry eventually. It's not just games, of course. With movies and music having been around for that much longer, things are even worse there and this is obviously a contributing factor in the creation of emo and its epic titles needed for full angst expression: take Panic! At The Disco's *There's A Good Reason Why These Tables Are Numbered Honey, You Just Haven't Thought Of It Yet*, for example. Back with gaming, this year's E3 presented an uncountable number of generic 'one from column A, one from column B' titles, and the two schools of thought seem to be that a game's title should either be distressingly obvious (take a bow, *Gun*) or indecipherably obscure. Congratulations then, Gust – you've just taken that second category to a whole new level.

Compared with the previous game, the first thing that really stands out is just how much more of a budget feel there is about this sequel. While *Eternal Mana*'s world was colourful and exuberant, the same effort and attention to detail clearly hasn't been lavished upon *The Azoth Of Destiny* – many backgrounds are bland three-dimensional maps where the last game would have had wonderfully artistic settings. Sprites, by contrast, are still pretty nice (even if quite a few are just recycled from the last game) but when placed on the blurry backdrops, the whole thing just doesn't gel as it should and ends up looking messy. As before, much of the game is voice acted, and again the standard is generally pretty good with only the odd line really prompting a raised eyebrow. Dialogue is a somewhat different matter and although the game's box carries the Nippon Ichi emblem, the firm's mere publishing capacity explains why most attempts at humour fall rather short of the laugh-out-loud moments of *Disgaea*.

The lack of attention to aesthetics is a real shame as beneath the shabby surface, there have been plenty of tweaks and changes that make the whole game function and flow both better and more easily. For the most part, these are just simple alterations such as menu navigation and item storage, but they do make all the difference. The game also benefits from a number of more serious changes, most notably its new combat system and the manner in which random encounters are handled. The latter is arguably *The Azoth Of Destiny*'s only real stab at innovation – a gauge

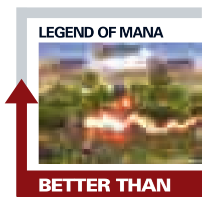
FAQs

Q. IS IT LONG?
Not particularly – *Atelier Iris 2* is a pretty lightweight RPG and most players will be able to blitz through it in a week or so.

Q. NOT MUCH TO DO THEN?
Quite the opposite – there are loads of items to create and so on and so forth, there's just very little in the way of extra-curricular activity.

Q. ARE THERE ANY PRINNIES?
Sorry, dood. Nippon Ichi is only the publisher of *Atelier Iris*; and Gust isn't quite awesome enough for Prinnies.

LEGEND OF MANA



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

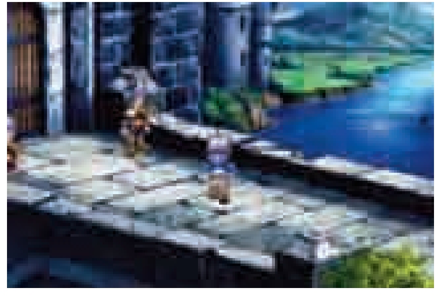


ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
MIX N MATCH: Viese stays home and cooks up all kinds of useful items through synthesis…
ONE-HIT WONDER: … while Felt ventures into unknown territory for the adventure sections.



Characters can be switched in during a turn without sacrificing someone's move – a welcome feature.



He's defeated dragons and is letting two guards stand in his way? Were this *Oblivion*, we'd sword them in the face.



The effects are pretty, but they don't make up for the comparatively drab backgrounds.

in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen displays a representation of how many battles remain in an area as well as the likelihood of one occurring. As it changes from blue to red, random encounters go from unlikely to inevitable, and once the gauge depletes you can wander freely through that part of the map for a given time. Return later, though, and encounters are back on the menu – this looks to be in place to stop abusing item and element drops from certain monsters rather than to save the player's sanity as you can easily pass through many of the game's terrains with only a couple of encounters.

Battles themselves now play out in accordance with an on-screen time bar. Not entirely unlike *Grandia 2*'s combat system: when your character's icon reaches the right-hand side you get to pick an action. But to mix this up a little, each character has the choice of two different types of attack on top of the usual array of special abilities and items. The Charge Attack fills your power gauge slightly in order to facilitate Skills while the Break Attack is what makes combat really interesting. Break Attacks shunt enemies back along the time bar and if this is enough to knock them into the orange area on the left, they become stunned and you can continually chain further attacks until all enemies leave this 'dizzy' area. Early in the game, this seems pretty useless, but once you get your full quota of characters, there's a lot more potential to build up massive combos which, in turn, grant more experience when the battle draws to a close.

Where its predecessor had depth in spades, and plenty of hidden bits and pieces to make sure you played the game to its fullest, *The Azoth Of Destiny* is somewhat barren by comparison. There's nowhere near as much freedom in the synthesis or exploration and many of the more interesting elements of the previous adventure have been streamlined or chopped out all together. This ends up making *Atelier Iris 2* a far simpler and therefore more accessible RPG – but to what ends? With its mouthful of a title and suffixed number indicative of it being a sequel, it's unlikely that many people will pick up this game on a whim, fans of the charming previous game, on the other hand, might well do so only to find it not dissimilar to your parents replacing your Technic Lego with Duplo while you're at school.

Ultimately, *Atelier Iris 2* isn't so much a bad game as a disappointing sequel that fails to build on its predecessor's strengths. Without the production values of the first game, and with so many great elements canned rather than built upon between instalments, it's hard to pinpoint just who the game is really aimed at. If you like your RPGs simple, inoffensive and playable, *The Azoth Of Destiny* is definitely worth a look, but for anyone familiar with the rest of Nippon Ichi's output, *Atelier Iris 2* will dazzle and at times almost insult with its simplicity. A real missed opportunity.

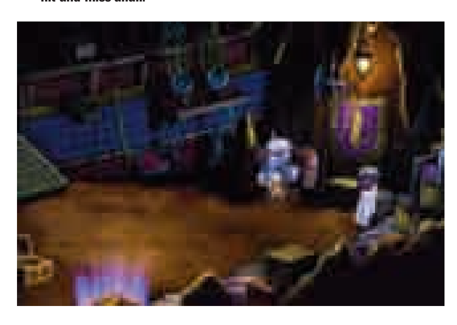
VERDICT 6/10
SOFTCORE RPG SEQUEL THAT PROMISED MORE

MIND YOUR MANAS

Strangely absent from *Atelier Iris 2* is the Mana friendship system that worked so well in the first game. This prevented the player from exploiting Mana Synthesis by having the Mana used in creating items get tired and increasingly distant as more items are created. To remedy this, hard-earned items have to be offered as gifts to raise Mana morale and health – keep them all happy and they produce extra items. Instead, *Azoth Of Destiny* lets you churn out Mana items like they're going out of fashion, making most of the game incredibly simple by comparison.



Harvesting alchemical ingredients for synthesis is a very hit-and-miss affair.





It is possible to have the girl stay at home and the boy go out adventuring without being sexist; *Lost In Blue* managed it.



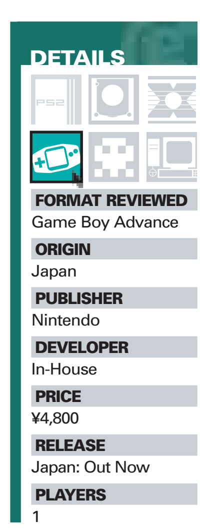
A good, old-fashioned punch in the face. How boring when you have amazing Mana powers.



That mushroom is freakish; it has no eyes. We never picked up on how horrible it was while we were actually fighting it.

MOTHER 3

MORE THAN A DECADE IN THE MAKING, SHIGESATO ITOI'S THIRD MOTHER RPG IS FINALLY HERE



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
Japan: Out Now

PLAYERS
1

The role-playing game is part of a bizarre genre. It's like the huge curio that is politics – there are infinite slight variations between various extreme approaches, but it's often difficult to tell what the differences are without studying manifestos. Or in this case without playing RPGs for hundreds of hours on end. There are a few role-playing games, though, which have distinct appearances and stand out from the crowded backbenches where *Breath Of Fire* and *Legend Of Dragoon* snooze away their afternoons.

Mother is the Boris Johnson of RPGs. It has a sense of humour – although it may not be appreciated in Liverpool – and its presence has inflated over time. So, what would Boris have to say about *Mother 3*? Never mind, listen.

If you're not familiar with the lineage of this undervalued Nintendo series, its history scrolls like this: *Mother* was released on the 8-bit Famicom in Japan, it was never exported, but these days a translated ROM image is in circulation followed by *Mother 2* on the Super Famicom (which appeared on the US SNES as *Earthbound*) and *Mother 3* was due on Nintendo's 64DD circa 1997. It was delayed until eventually Nintendo cancelled the project. All talk of it lulled to a quiet echo until the recent re-release of *Mother 1+2* on Game Boy Advance which is the format that *Mother 3* has ended up on ten years after it was originally shown at Nintendo's Spaceworld '96 trade show.

The difference between *Mother 3* and the first two games is – after ten years of deliberation – only minimal. Again, a quirky cast of characters (quirky in personality, that is; not quirky because they have huge spiked hair or guns attached to their limbs), connecting lost family members and a pet dog, journey through an alternate Earth/America to solve their individual problems and, ultimately, defeat the pig men who are snorting havoc in Nowhere Island. *Mother 3*'s format is such that it breaks down to eight separate adventures, each of which takes around five hours to complete. Although the game is episodic in this sense, there are links between adventures – story overlaps and consistent characters – which give at least the impression that *Mother 3* is a single, 40-hour-long epic. Viewed from that perspective, there is more to see and do in *Mother 3* than there was in either of the previous *Mother* titles.

One obvious differentiating factor, however, is *Mother 3*'s rhythmic battle system. Music is the key. According to enemy type, the battle tunes change; but in any case, *Mother 3* rewards

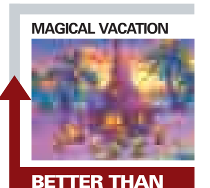
FAQs

Q. WHO IS SHIGESATO ITOI?
He is the godfather of *Mother*, if that makes familial sense. You can find his blog (in Japanese) at 1101.com.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OLD MOTHER 3?
Prototype 64DD disks undoubtedly exist. In fact, two such disks were sold on eBay recently, although the chances of them containing anything beyond ten per cent complete code are slim to none.

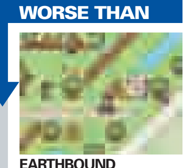
Q. WILL MOTHER 4 EVER HAPPEN?
Itoi has gone all hush hush again, which leads us to expect a wait of, say, 12 years. See you in 2018.

MAGICAL VACATION

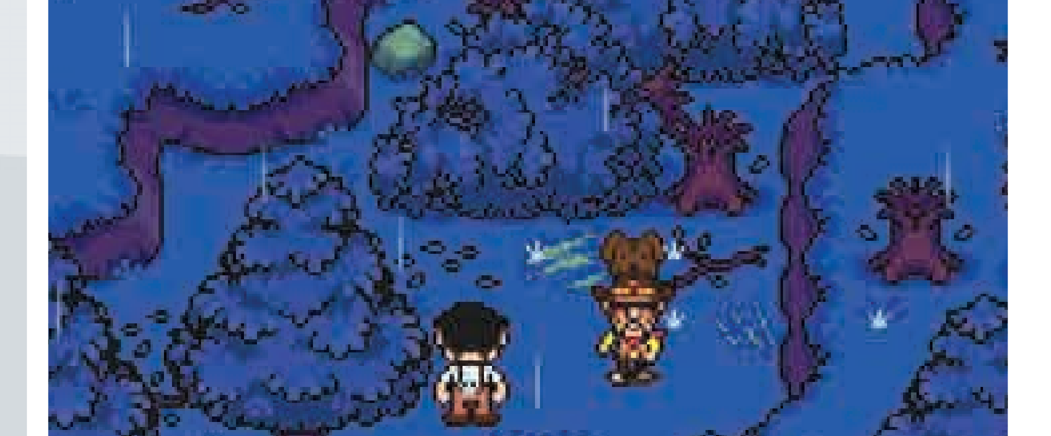


BETTER THAN

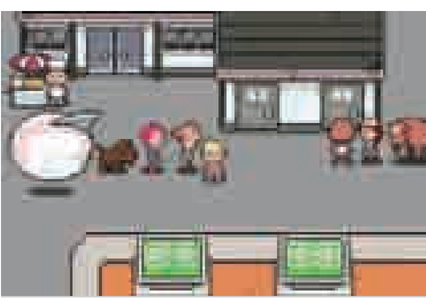
WORSE THAN



EARTHBOUND



Forests are blue at night – at least, they are in *Mother 3*. The expert use of palette to achieve atmosphere is typical of Brownie Brown's *Magical Vacation* games.



Lucas, the blonde kid, looks on bemused as the town centre overfills with odd creatures and ice cream.



Forest fires give *Mother 3*'s adventurers a problem in an alternate Wild West setting.

you if you can keep in time – tapping A – with the countless numbers on this cart. Regardless of what assaults enemy characters are able to launch, simply tapping along can double the effectiveness of your own attacks. Somehow, this feature twists the typical sensation of being 'in battle' to the extent that fights become light-hearted, enjoyable occasions. In other words, the antithesis of big menu screens and turn-based lethargy.

There's another battle-related advantage which *Mother 3* lauds over its more serious-faced rivals: no randomness. You can see potential jousters on screen no matter where you are exploring, and you can avoid them if you so wish. The presence of this simple choice moves *Mother 3* away from so many other RPGs; arguably, it's a choice which the player always deserves to be given. Admittedly, there are instances here which equate level ups with progress or at least the ability to progress past high-level enemies and bosses, but the player can choose when and how to effect level ups by kicking off only worthy battles. No time is wasted in *Mother 3*, and that adds immeasurably to the sense of satisfaction you can gain from playing it.

As for *Mother/Earthbound*'s famously droll brand of humour, that too is retained. Japanese developers do get irony, after all – and there's plenty of proof of that in the pudding that is *Mother 3*. To talk in specifics will ruin set-pieces for potential players, but the overall tone is what counts: characters make mockeries of each other, nothing can be taken at face value, and there are more unexpected twists in *Mother 3*'s story than there are in any David Mitchell novel. This is Shigesato Itoi's ace card. He has a game which could easily have been released on Super Famicom ten years ago, yet in many ways this was a story worth waiting a decade for. In the West, we have the legacy of *Monkey Island* and *Broken Sword*; in the East, they enjoy the impossibly well-written banter of *Mother*.

Visually, *Mother 3* has reverted to type. There are no signs of the 64DD build's polygonal world; it's sprites all the way. Fortunately, the animation and detail packed into character design is sufficient to distinguish the game as a kind of post-GBA GBA game: it wouldn't look out of place on Nintendo DS.

Mother 3 only falls short of what was expected of it because, a) it is not a huge departure from its 12-year-old predecessor, and b) the waiting period was unbearably long. Waiting for *Mother 3* was like waiting for the new Daft Punk LP. Both deliver, but not quite in the way we expected them to.

games™

FINGERPRINT

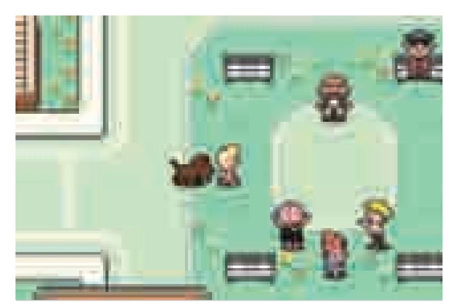
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DANCE DANCE: *Mother 3*'s battle system is fresh but not quite a revolution. The game's standard attacks and special moves are strengthened if you can keep in time with battle music. Alas there is no dance attack.

On GBA's small screen, or even on a DS display, the game looks reasonably detailed, but it's the character animation that will make your eyes smile.

NITTY GRITTY

As with *Mother 2*, albeit in slightly different form, *Mother 3*'s foundations are solid. There are plenty of save points in the form of frogs, the dialogue – even of inconsequential characters – is always entertaining, and the sheer variety of encounters you'll face is unrivalled within the RPG genre and includes pig men, zombie dogs and crickets. Ultimately, *Mother 3*'s style is non-conforming, a mishmash of the rules that other RPGs stick to. There are long spells when you'll be adventuring alone, but then there are other adventures which introduce multiple characters, leaving you with a band of journeymen á là any game by Square-Enix.



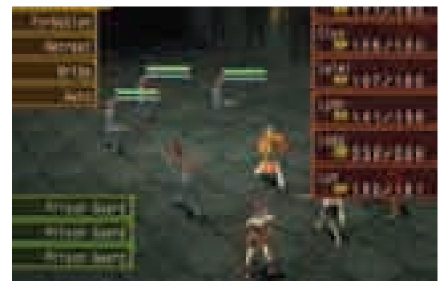
Nowhere Island is full of loonies in parks, dressed like Village People and twice as entertaining.

VERDICT 8/10

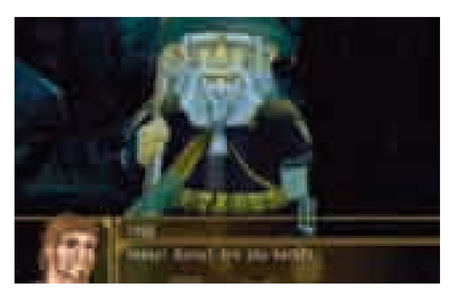
TEN YEARS' SUPREME SCRIPTING – BUT NOTHING MORE



Thankfully, you won't be spending ALL of your time on boats or at sea, unlike in *Suikoden IV*.



Just hit 'Auto'. It's the 'win button' effect. Alternatively you could sit and watch the tedious battle play out.



Character design is hardly consistent, but then the game's whole visual design seems rather rushed and confused.

SUIKODEN V

ONE SILENT PRINCE, BUT NOT A KATAMARI IN SIGHT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
Q3 '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

There's a lot to be said for immediacy in gaming. Just as most action films start off with an explosive scene to draw the viewer in, many games follow in the same tradition of grabbing the player in the first few minutes. *God Of War's* hydra battle, for example, does just that, and *Devil May Cry 3's* opening pretty much makes you never want to play anything else. It's just a real shame that with so much groundwork to be done, role-playing games often struggle to do the same – precious few developers seem to value this immediacy within the genre. By that token, it's almost expected for most RPGs to start slow, but in *Suikoden V*, we may have found the most tedious and laborious opening hours ever seen in a game.

Persevere, though, and matters slowly get a whole lot better as more and more elements of classic *Suikoden* gameplay slip back into the game. While *III* opted for the original POV system and *IV* took things out to sea, *Suikoden V* sees Konami pandering to the fans by going back to its roots. The game is faithful to the original PSOne games in almost every respect – whether or not this is a good thing depends very much on your opinion of both the series and what an RPG should do. Mimicking a six-year-old game does mean that *Suikoden V* feels a lot more primitive than many recent RPGs, but fans of the series will simply be happy to see it find its way again.

While the screen-shattering effect of *Final Fantasy VII* combined with the wonderful soundtrack to create a real sense of urgency to the battles, *Suikoden V's* mellow fade into battle and forgettable themes are rather disappointing, if perhaps strangely indicative of the fights themselves. The fixed and distant isometric viewpoint does the game few favours, and, with most battles, there's no reason not to simply pick the Auto option, which may as well be a 'win' button in the majority of cases. Random battles are infrequent enough so as not to get irritating – which is a bonus – and the special battles from previous games also return to spice things up a little. Army battles take the form of a simple RTS with the lingering worry of a comrade lost here being gone for good – its an interesting idea, but when losing an ally falls almost exclusively to chance, there's no guilt in loading a previous save and hoping for survival the second time around. Naval battles are similar, but it's the duels that really win through – even if they are just nicely animated versions of paper-scissors-stone with clues.

With the game harking back to the first two in the series, it's almost a shame that the visual style didn't follow to complete the retro package – as we've seen from the likes of *Atelier Iris*, there's still a lot that can be done with sprites. Instead, though, Konami has put together one of

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Think 50-odd hours going through normally – add another 25 or so if you're thinking about going for all of the Stars Of Destiny.

Q. STARS OF DESTINY, YOU SAY?
Yes. Yes we do. Like the previous *Suikoden* games, there are 108 characters that can be recruited to your cause.

Q. IS IT EASY TO GET THEM?
Oh, hell no. You'll need to do loads of backtracking and be in the right places at the right time if you want to make the optimum number of friends.

SUIKODEN IV



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUIKODEN II





Ooooh yes he did! We wonder if a cataclysmic event will follow.

Bats! Yay! Time-honoured RPG foes of steel.

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

NOT ALL AT SEA: Thankfully, the ocean-based nature of *IV* is not carried over into *V*.

OLD-SCHOOL: Fans of the series rejoice – it's back to the good old days for *Suikoden*.

the most erratic visual works in recent memory, veering wildly from bland to lush and back again in the space of minutes. Voice work, on the other hand, is consistently strong, and while it is in keeping with previous *Suikoden* games, the idea of a silent lead is not quite what it once was.

It's hard to determine whether it's the concept or execution that feels wrong here, but given that other games have pulled it off, all signs point to the latter. The silent prince just isn't a likeable lead and that in itself presents something of a problem. Luckily for the game, many of the other characters are far more interesting and entertaining and most of these are tied into the core narrative so you'll see plenty of them. As is traditional, the storyline is an extremely well handled political affair. Indeed, if it weren't for this its pretty much fair to say that *Suikoden V* would be among the most futile 50 hours of your life.

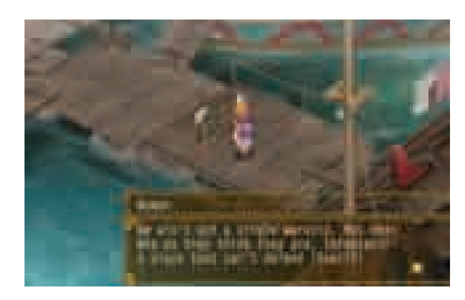
This certainly isn't a game without its charms, but where we have already been treated to the quirky humour of *Shadow Hearts*, the beauty of *Atelier Iris*, and the depth of *Final Fantasy XII* this year, *Suikoden V* finds it understandably difficult to carve itself a niche. This is Konami's equivalent of *Final Fantasy X-2* – fan service of the highest order. But while *X-2* offered fans of the previous game a continuation of sorts, *Suikoden V* is effectively Konami apologising for its last effort and trying to keep fans from jumping ship with what is a dangerously familiar adventure. Still, it's a fair apology and even if it is among the least taxing games you'll ever play, the story and sense of nostalgia are at least strong enough to keep your attention after the tepid first few hours. Definitely one for the fans, this is effectively a carbon copy of *Suikoden II*, which is exactly what devout Suikodenites will have been calling for for years. A great *Suikoden* game, then, but only a fair role-playing game by today's standards.

VERDICT 6/10

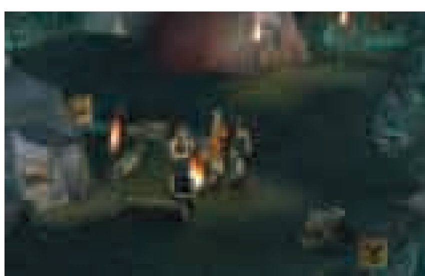
SLOW AND SIMPLE, BUT DECENT ONCE IT FINDS ITS STRIDE

FORMATION NATION

New to *Suikoden V* is the ability to set your six combatants up in a variety of formations rather than the simple ranks you're used to. Depending on their weapon, each character has an effective range that needs to be taken into account when picking a formation – there's no sense going for an arrow formation with a single guy up front if your posse is made up of short-range fighters. Each setup has its own merits, but we're big fans of the idea of finding a formation in a chest as happens quite often. A minor addition, and, given the simplicity of the battles in general, it won't be a major concern. Still, at least there are things in there to remind you that you're not just playing *Suikoden II* again in 3D.



By the way, you're going to need to build more lumber camps and large boatyards, mate.



Warning: this game's opening hours are among the most tedious to be found anywhere in videogames.

WE'RE GETTING DÉJÀ-VU

FIELD COMMANDER

DETAILS





FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Sony Online Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

At first glance, *Field Commander's* similarities to *Advance Wars* are not immediately apparent other than the obvious shared tenets of the handheld turn-based strategy war-game. Quasi-realistic graphics and an isometric battle viewpoint distance it stylistically from Intelligent Systems' handheld classic, and its approach to warfare seems considerably more sober and conventional, all mission briefs and codenames, and division numbers as opposed to *Advance Wars'* inspired characterisation and pre-battle bantering. Get a mission or two into the game, however, and the similarities suddenly become distressingly evident.

Field Commander has the same unit types, the same terrain – the same terrain values, for heaven's sake. Different unit models do little to alleviate the feeling that you're playing a modern-day equivalent of what *Great Giana Sisters* was to *Super Mario Bros* – with the advance of technology, visual similarity between titles with near-identical concepts has become less pronounced, but that only serves to make the gameplay similarity even more jarringly obvious.

It is evident, given that this is the PSP's *Advance Wars* clone, that *Field Commander* is an immensely enjoyable game. Units are exceptionally well balanced, combat is cerebral and tense, and the maps are considered and full of strategic opportunities. The game's full 3D battle animations are pleasing too; the satisfaction of seeing a heavily armoured pest of a tank explode into itty bitty pieces with a bang and some pretty effects is something that Nintendo DS couldn't replicate. *Field Commander's* story, perhaps the only feature that is entirely its own, is well told, and the universally acceptable and occasionally inspired voice acting on the part of your commanders, accomplices and maniacal enemies is almost worth the load times. Almost.

Though they were considerably worse when the game was at the preview stage, *Field Commander's* extended loading pauses still grate occasionally once you've chosen a division and are eager to launch into battle with the mysterious Shadow Nation. It is excellently presented throughout, and with progress in the single-player game comes the opportunity to use all the Commanding Officers, maps and army divisions against friends via ad hoc or the Internet, which in turn is a very enjoyable experience.

Field Commander is a little bit too much like *Advance Wars* for us to recommend it too highly for owners of both PSP and DS. For those who own only the former, however, *Field Commander* is verging on an essential purchase. Its brand of handheld strategy may not be entirely its own, but it is still addictive and absorbing. *Field Commander* has chosen a good series to emulate, and it emulates it with panache.

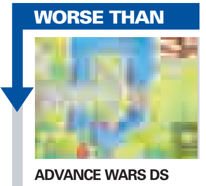
VERDICT 7/10
SUPERB BUT PLAGIARISTIC HANDHELD WARFARE

LORD OF THE RINGS: TACTICS

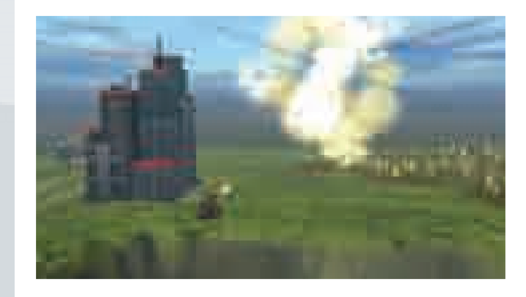


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ADVANCE WARS DS





Field Commander's presentation is altogether quite conventional, but it's still lively.



The sea units – all the units, for that matter – are *Advance Wars* equivalents. The only unique one is the Command Centre which launches devastatingly powerful attacks.

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TAKING GAMING ONLINE
GLOAT: Fight someone online and storm their base in a glorious and triumphant victory…
MOPE: …then check the online leaderboards and find that they're actually 208 places above you.


eMag



Gone but yacht forgotten **Run The Gauntlet, Amstrad [Ocean] 1989**


MAP
TIME
00:49
LAP 1


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.47 AUGUST 2006
00p
SPECTRUM SPECIAL
25 PAGES OF PURE SPECCY BLISS
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Q&A WITH…
Ritman, Pickford, Harbison and Butler
HISTORY OF SPECTRUM
A complete guide to the legendary machine
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Look no further for the best guide to the classic consoles and illustrious software

Welcome, dear readers, to a very special edition of Retro. This month we have decided to dedicate the entire section to the most important home computer ever made, Sir Clive's wonderful ZX Spectrum.

Over the next 25 pages you'll find an in-depth look at the actual machine, some of the greatest games that were ever released for it, as well as a brand-new round-table interview with industry veterans Jon Ritman, Ste Pickford, Bill Harbison and Simon Butler. This is all brought to you in association with our sister magazine *Retro Gamer* – sharp-eyed readers among you may remember Martyn Carroll's excellent Spectrum feature (eyes right) from issue 19. Don't worry, we're certainly not just filling Retro with second-hand material, we simply thought that this would be a great opportunity to rekindle some of that special Speccy love for a machine adored by a dedicated legion of fans.

You never know, we may well revisit the format in a couple of months' time, but that will obviously depend on how all you readers out there respond. This is simply a chance for you to join hands with us and look back at one of our favourite gaming machines of all time. Nothing more, nothing less…



Darran Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer



YEAR RELEASED: 1982

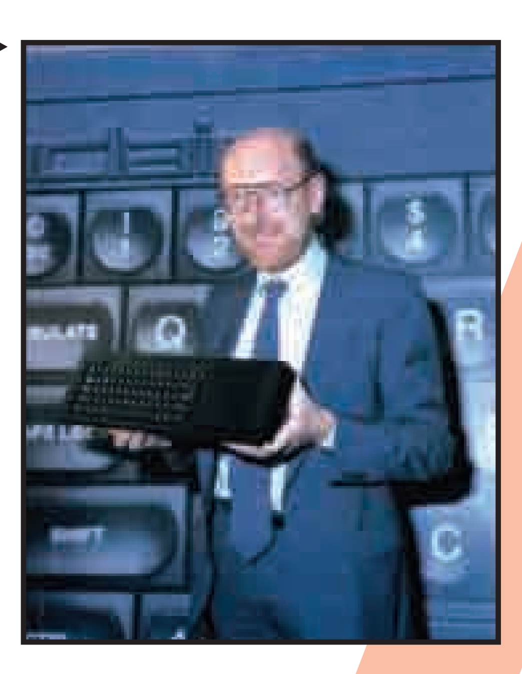
ORIGINAL PRICE: £125 (£175 48K)

BUY IT NOW FOR: £10+

ASSOCIATED MAGAZINES: CRASH, YOUR SINCLAIR, SINCLAIR USER, SINCLAIR PROGRAMS, SINCLAIR ANSWERS, ZX COMPUTING

WHY THE SPECTRUM WAS GREAT: OWNING A SPECTRUM WAS LIKE BEING PART OF A SECRET CLUB. LIKE-MINDED GAMERS WHO KNEW WHAT IT MEANT TO TYPE OUT HUNDRED-LINE POKES, WAIT TEN MINUTES FOR *THE HOBBIT* TO LOAD, AND HAD MASTERED THE ART OF TAPE-TO-TAPE COPYING.

Sinclair Research boss Sir Clive Sinclair, pictured here at the QL launch in January 1984. ▶



Retro Feature

THE HUMBLE SINCLAIR SPECTRUM WAS SMALL AND UNASSUMING, YET IT MANAGED TO CONQUER THE UK COMPUTER MARKET DURING THE EIGHTIES AND WAS COMMERCIALLY VIABLE FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. DURING THIS TIME, THE MACHINE WON THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS, AND A THRIVING FAN SCENE NOW EXISTS. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE LITTLE COMPUTER THAT OVERCAME THE ODDS AND MADE IT BIG

sinclair ZX SPECTRUM



Having made a name for himself in the electronics field, releasing everything from pocket calculators to tiny TVs, Sir Clive Sinclair turned his entrepreneurial gaze toward computers, and in 1978 he launched the MK14. It was sold in kit form and proved little more than a programmable calculator, but sales of over 50,000 convinced Sir Clive that there was a hunger for computers aimed at hobbyists.

In early 1980, Sinclair released the ZX80, a diminutive home computer with a touch-sensitive membrane keyboard and just 1K of memory. It too was sold in kit form for £79, but crucially a pre-built version was available for £99, opening up the world of computers to more general home users who weren't prepared to whip out a soldering iron and start bolting bits together. However, it was ZX80's enhanced successor ZX81 that really kick-started the UK home computing craze. Released in March 1981 and available for either £49 (kit form) or £69 (pre-built), it sold more than 400,000 in just over a year. Sinclair had devised the ultimate entry-level computer and the British public were buying into it.

But Sir Clive wasn't about to stand idly by, counting the cheques and postal orders that were pouring into his hectic mail order department. The industry he'd had a hand in creating was moving very fast, and competitors were queuing up for a piece of the pie. To compound matters, the cost of components and memory was tumbling all the time, allowing more manufacturers to tap into the low-cost computer market that belonged almost exclusively to Sinclair. Plus, there was the small matter of Acorn beating Sinclair to a lucrative BBC contract that would ultimately see Acorn computers installed in classrooms up and down the country. It was time for Sir Clive to dig in and fight his corner.

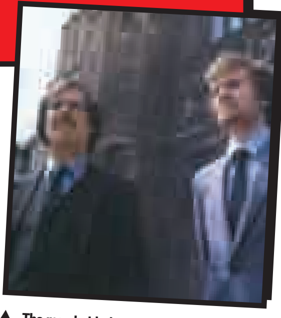
To this end, Sinclair began to mastermind the ZX82 and ZX83 models. The former would supersede the ZX81, adding sound capabilities, colour graphics and a moving keyboard to the mix, while the latter was hoped to seize control of the small-business market.

The eventual fortunes of the two machines couldn't be more different. The ZX82 was renamed the ZX Spectrum and went on to become Britain's best selling

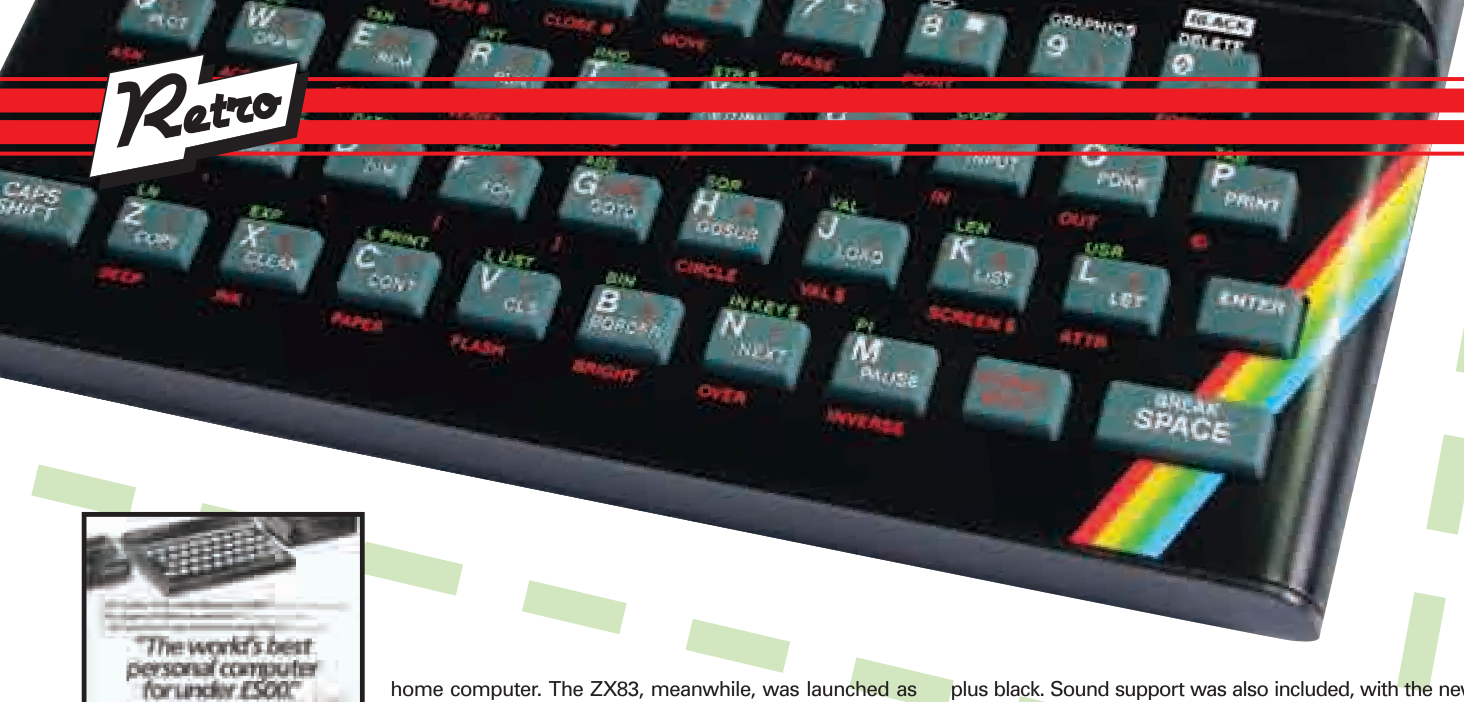
TECH SPECS

A trusty Zilog Z80A chip running at 3.54MHz powered the Spectrum. The machine was available with either 16K or 48K of RAM, and Sinclair BASIC was provided on a 16K ROM chip. The video display could output 24 lines of text with 32 character positions, and 192 x 256 pixels for high-resolution graphics. The Spectrum had very few external connectors. There was TV out, ear and mic ports to connect a tape recorder, and a 28-pin expansion slot for connecting a wide range of peripherals including joystick interfaces, printers and Sinclair's own Microdrive storage system.

Sinclair's Richard Altwasser, who had previously helped develop the ZX81, designed the Spectrum's hardware. The ROM code was written almost entirely by Steve Vickers of Nine Tiles Information Handling (a small portion was adapted from the original ZX80 ROM code written by John Grant), while Sinclair designer Rick Dickinson created the casing and infamous 'dead flesh' keyboard.



▲ The men behind the Spectrum, Steve Vickers (left) of Nine Tiles and Richard Altwasser of Sinclair Research.



▲ The machine's first print ad sang the Spectrum's praises so far as to even include a glowing quote from Sir Clive himself.

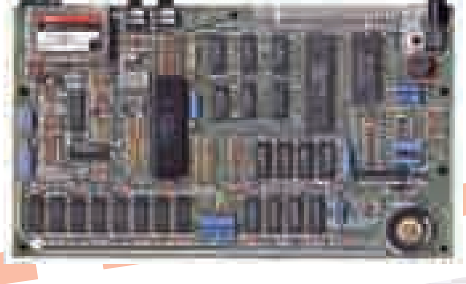
home computer. The ZX83, meanwhile, was launched as the Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap) in 1984 and failed to make an impression as a business machine. QL is now regarded as an embarrassing footnote in the Sinclair story, second only to the disastrous C5 motorised tricycle (although, to be honest, the C5 is more of an epitaph than a footnote).

RAINBOW BRIGHT

In April 1982, long before the QL and C5 tarnished Sir Clive's name, the Spectrum was launched in a blaze of publicity at the Earls Court Computer Show. Shortly after its unveiling, an advert for the new machine began to appear in specialist computer mags. It was typically text-heavy and very 'Sinclair', hammering home each of the machine's 'astonishing' new features. Topping the list of key features was its hi-res colour graphic capabilities. Whereas ZX80/81 were monochrome, Spectrum lived up to its name by outputting seven colours plus black. Sound support was also included, with the new 'Beep' command allowing you to control pitch and duration. The advert went on to reveal details of a full-size moving keyboard that would replace the plastic membrane used on the ZX80/81. To seal the deal, Spectrum came with a generous amount of RAM – 16K as standard, with an expanded 48K version also available.

But what about the price? Would Sir Clive be able to continue his noble aim of delivering affordable computers to the masses? The answer was a resounding yes. The 16K model was available for just £125, and for £50 more you could take home the 48K version. Compare that to the C64 which launched in the UK at £299, or even better the BBC Model B which would lighten your pocket to the tune of £399. Sinclair had soundly undercut the competition and looked to have sewn up the market once again.

The advert posed a problem however. Spectrum simply sounded too good to be true. All those features for such a competitive price. There had to be a catch. But before anyone could see the machine and make up their own minds, they had to suffer Sinclair's famously unreliable mail order department. Customers were advised to allow up to 28 days for delivery, and yet those who'd placed their orders early typically had to wait between 12 and 16 weeks for their shiny new machines to arrive. During the latter half of 1982, Sinclair was reportedly manufacturing 20,000 Spectrums a month and yet was still unable to meet the huge demand. It didn't help that a quantity of machines were earmarked for overseas markets following a steady European roll out. Things did ease somewhat by early 1983, mainly because the Spectrum was made available through WHSmiths and other high street chains.



◀ The Spectrum was a fairly simple machine with no dedicated graphics hardware, and limited expansion options. [Photo: Bill Bertram]



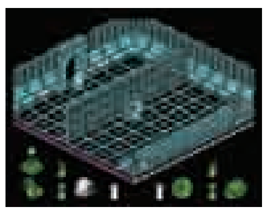
▲ Released in April 1982, the Spectrum went on to become the UK's best selling home computer.

RUBBER SOUL

The advert flagged Spectrum as a "Powerful professional's computer", but in several respects the new computer was very similar to its more primitive forebears. It's believed that this was intentional on Sir Clive's part as a means of speeding up production and keeping costs down.

At first glance it was obvious that Sinclair had performed another miracle of miniaturisation. The Spectrum was just 23cm wide, 14cm long and 3cm deep. The most noticeable new addition was the small rubber keys that poked through the sleek black casing. A single sheet of spongy rubber was used, and by pressing down on a key, the contact underneath was closed and then the key sprung back to its original position. It was preferable to the ZX81's touch-sensitive keyboard, and probably as cost effective, but to call it a 'full-size, moving-key keyboard' was a bit optimistic.



▲ Great games that made a splash on the Speccy. From left to right: *Manic Miner*, *Ant Attack*, *Lords Of Midnight* and *Head Over Heels*.

The actual keyboard layout was almost identical to that which debuted on ZX80. There were 40 keys in total, compared to the average 60-70 keys found on computers with proper typewriter-style keyboards. The updated Sinclair BASIC retained its one-touch keyword entry system, where a typical key could be used to enter five different commands depending which shift keys it was pressed with. This input method baffled beginners and proved far too restrictive for more seasoned users. To complicate matters, a number of new BASIC commands were introduced taking the total number of keyboard functions to a finger-bending 193. In some cases it would be quicker to manually type the command than press the required series of keys. Again, the advert was slightly wide of the mark with its 'one-touch' keyword entry claims.

What about the new colour capabilities? Well, Sinclair actually undersold Spectrum in this respect. There were eight basic colours, yet the 'Bright' command could be applied to every colour except black, making 15 in total. Coupled with the surprisingly high screen resolution (256 x 192 pixels), Spectrum's display capabilities could rival machines retailing at twice the price. The drawback was that to save memory, each 8 x 8 pixel square could only display a foreground and background colour. As a result, in games where a character sprite of one colour passed over a background of a different colour, the colour of the sprite would bleed into the background. This so-called 'colour clash' effect was unique to the Spectrum much to the amusement of C64 and Amstrad CPC owners. We can now look back and say that colour clash gave Speccy games a certain charm, but back in the day such wistful reasoning would never have settled those playground spats.

Rather than blast sound through your TV set, Spectrum featured a small internal speaker known as the 'Beeper' because it… beeped. You could control the length and tone of the beep, but not the volume – a shame as the speaker was barely audible in the first batch of models off the production line. Worse still, the speaker would temporarily freeze the processor while it played a sound. Considering what they had to work with, it's amazing that programmers could add sound effects and music to games at all. Even more remarkable is that musicians like Martin Galway and Tim Follin developed routines that simulated multiple sound channels. It was also possible to play sampled speech through the speaker, albeit in very crude fashion.

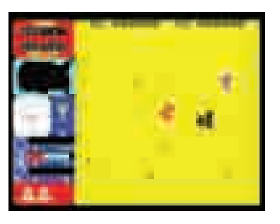
PLAY THE GAME

Despite these technical shortcomings, the Spectrum quickly generated a huge range of independent software. Games were incredibly popular and unofficial versions of arcade classics such as *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* and *Breakout* quickly flooded the market. Software houses that had sprung up to support the ZX81 were drawn to the new machine, attracted by its colour graphics, relatively huge memory (in the 48K version, at least), and rapidly growing user base.

Bug-Byte, Mikro-Gen, Quicksilva, Imagine, Ocean and dozens of other developers made a name (and a small fortune) for themselves during these early years, but one company in particular stood out from the crowd. Ashby Computer Graphics, then operating under the trade name Ultimate: Play The Game and now known as Rare, set the whole scene alight with a series of stunning Spectrum games. Its first four releases (*Jetpac*, *Pssst*, *Cookie* and *Tranz Am*) became best selling classics that other developers could only dream of, and yet they all ran on a standard 16K Spectrum. Ultimate's 48K games were bigger and better, with titles like *Atic Atac*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* whipping the computer press into a dribbling frenzy. Other ground-breaking games that debuted on the Spectrum before being ported to different machines included Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner*, Sandy White's *Ant Attack*, Mike Singleton's *Lords Of Midnight* and Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels*, among many others. Spectrum really was home to an embarrassing number of great titles.

It was this catalogue of games, as wide as it was deep, that pushed Spectrum sales through the roof. In the run up to Christmas 1983, over 50,000 machines were sold every month in the UK. As the cost of components fell, Sinclair fuelled demand further by slashing the price of the Spectrum. The 16K model was reduced to just £99, nestling just under the psychological price barrier of £100, and the 48K version retailed at a very attractive £129.

This was the Spectrum's golden period, but sadly it didn't last much beyond 1984. In October of that year Sinclair released the Spectrum+, which, rather than being the souped-up Speccy that buyers and retailers hoped for, merely added a moving QL-style keyboard. Similarly, the long-awaited Spectrum 128, which received a low-key UK launch in February 1986, was essentially a Spectrum+ with 128K memory, a new three-channel sound chip and an updated version of Sinclair BASIC. These updates were cautious – lazy even – perhaps because by this time Sinclair's focus (and finances) had shifted almost exclusively to the doomed C5 project. In the summer of 1986, Amstrad acquired Sinclair's computing arm and went on to create Spectrum-based clones of its popular CPC range. Amstrad's +2 and +3 models were marketed as game machines and certainly attracted new buyers, but those who'd fallen in love with the ZX line would sadly never see a true successor to the Spectrum. Perhaps if Sinclair had continued to attack the competition as aggressively as it had done during the early Eighties then a 16-bit computer capable of undercutting the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST might have been a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, a place in computing history is unreservedly set aside for the not-so-humble Sinclair Spectrum.



WONDERFUL WORLD OF SPECTRUM

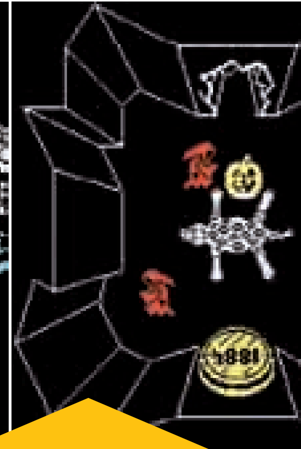
Speccy fans are fortunate in that one of the web's best retro sites is dedicated to the machine. World Of Spectrum (www.worldofspectrum.org) contains information on more than 12,500 games, with screenshots, links to reviews, and, in the vast majority of cases, downloadable ROMs that can be played on modern platforms via emulation. Don't let the presence of ROMs deter you though, webmaster Martijn van der Heide actively seeks permission from publishers to offer the games freely on the site, and will remove games if requested by an IP owner.

World Of Spectrum celebrated its tenth birthday last November, and we asked Martijn if he was planning to celebrate the anniversary. "Well, I've added a smallish new section to the site, covering the Timex versions of the Spectrum," he replied in typically modest fashion. But what about the long-term future of WOS? "It will take several more years to update the databases, so I hope to provide a more complete history over time. Other than that we are aiming to provide many more screenshots. And when more people have broadband Internet we'll shift to a more glossy, interactive environment." Sounds good, Martijn. Here's to the next ten years.

World Of Spectrum is not only the best Speccy site on the Internet, but also arguably the best retro resource full stop…

STARQUAKE HEAD OVER HEELS ATIC ATAC





STARQUAKE

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BUBBLEBUS SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** STEVE CROW

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** FIRELORD, WIZARD'S LAIR

Steve's Crow addictive flick-screen platformer mixes pure playability with crisp sci-fi graphics and frantic puzzle solving. It's a game where every aspect has been polished to perfection – be it the mini-Mastercards that open any doors (geddit?), the ability to summon temporary platforms beneath you at will, or the handy passworded teleporters that make light work of navigating the immense caverns. But it's its sheer speed that makes *Starquake* such an exhilarating Spectrum experience. Crow's devious mazes require serious cunning to traverse, and it's all kept at a feverish pace thanks to a constant supply of energy-sapping enemies. A must for every Spectrum aficionado, *Starquake* is pure 48K bliss.

ANT ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** QUICKSILVA

» **CREATED BY:** SANDY WHITE

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** I OF THE MASK, ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

Few titles in the early Eighties were as atmospheric or as terrifying as *Ant Attack*, the first real videogame to be viewed from an isometric perspective. The monotone graphics served to intensify the desolation of the abandoned walled city of Antescher, and made the sudden appearance of the titular arthropods even more shocking. Typical games are spent tearing around tomb-like structures desperately following the green or red signals from your scanner to locate each lost soul. Sudden ant attacks require a dash to high ground or a well-aimed grenade to avoid. A rare game that actually allowed you to choose your sex, *Ant Attack* is still a prime example of a simple concept well implemented and seared into the minds of a generation of gamers.

HEAD OVER HEELS

» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** NAMTIR RAIDERS, BATMAN, MATCHDAY I & II, MONSTER MAX

Pre 1987, Ritman and Drummond toyed with the likes of the similarly isometric *Batman*. But it was with *Head Over Heels* that the duo achieved greatness. It's hard to describe the impact this game had; it surpassed every other 3D platformer in an instant with its relentless assault of clever ideas, kitsch graphics and surefooted game design. Ritman is a master of Rubik's Cube-style puzzles, and nearly every room requires lateral thinking and fingertip dexterity. Dividing the Head and Heels characters' abilities so that they can only progress so far as separate entities and must join forces to complete the game is a masterstroke and typical of the ingenuity that seeps from the game's every pore.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** DENTON DESIGNS

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** ENIGMA FORCE, SHADOWFIRE, WHERE TIME STOOD STILL, COSMIC WARTOAD

In the year of the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, Spectrum owners were treated to one of the finest isometric adventures ever to appear on Sir Clive's rubber marvel. *The Great Escape* is set in a Colditz-style POW camp during WWII, and the objective is to escape before your morale is crushed, and without alerting the guards and getting thrown into the cooler. What makes the game so compelling is the attention to detail and a real sense of confinement. The graphics are finely crafted, and clever little touches like the morale flag, the searchlights at night, the hidden tunnels, and the way you default to the camp routine if you stop playing make the game a true classic. Just look at it.

ATIC ATAC

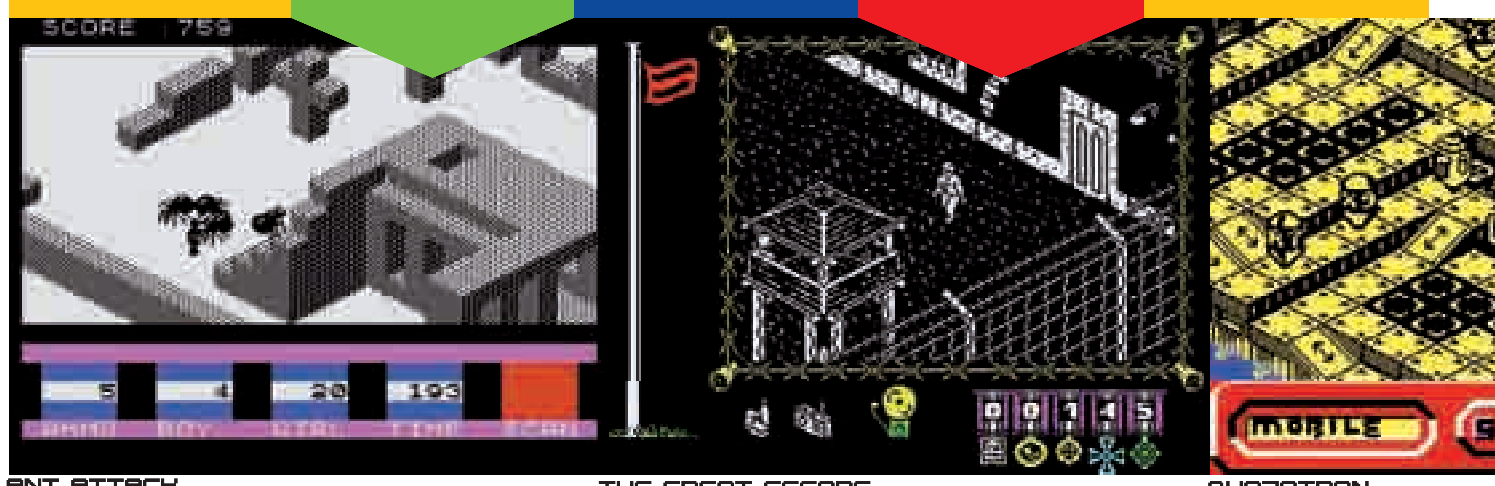
» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** ULTIMATE

» **CREATED BY:** TIM STAMPER, CHRIS STAMPER

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** LUNAR JETMAN, SABRE WULF, ALIEN 8, GUNFRIGHT, KNIGHTLORE

Okay, so no 'Perfect Ten' list for the Spectrum would be complete without a solid showing from Rare co-founders the Stamper brothers and their superb Ultimate label. *Atic Atac* makes it into the list by a narrow margin (so many Ultimate games are outright classics) because it set the scene for Ultimate to dominate the Spectrum. Playing as Knight, Wizard or Serf, *Atic Atac* is an overhead-perspective arcade adventure set over 200+ rooms in a gothic castle populated by endless minions, as well as Frankenstein, Quasimodo, the Mummy and of course Dracula. It's fast, it's challenging, and even today it will provide many hours of entertainment.



ANT ATTACK THE GREAT ESCAPE QUAZATRON

A magnificent machine like the Speccy deserves a well thought out and balanced appreciation of the ten best games. Now before you write in, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and of course open to violent debate, and that's what we're all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on.

BACK TO SKOOL

REBELSTAR

QUAZATRON

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **CREATED BY:** STEVE TURNER
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SPACE WARS 3D, AVALON, DRAGONTORC, RANA RAMA, ZYNAPS

We're going out on a bit of a limb here, because Steve Turner's *Quazatron* is not generally considered one of the top ten Spectrum games, but hey, it's our list, right? So what if it 'borrowed' C64 *Paradroid's* innovative 'grappling' system, and the lifts to other levels are a bit similar, *Quazatron* carves a niche for itself, and you can't deny the clever use of colour, the detail on the droids, and the *Marble Madness*-inspired gameplay. Where *Quazatron* scores highly is the player's desire to battle and strip the best parts from your fellow robots, boost their own abilities, and then wipe each level clean before descending to the next. A simply magnificent game.

BACK TO SKOOL

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICROSPHERE
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID REEDY
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SKOOL DAZE, WHEELIE, CONTACT SAM CRUISE

Together with the original *Skool Daze, Back To Skool* represents bedroom programming at its best – quintessentially British, packed with detail, and eminently playable, how could this game fail to appeal to its audience of rowdy teenagers? Allowing the player to individually name the cast of characters was Reedy's masterstroke because it meant your could personalise and relate to them instantly. What makes *Back To Skool* such a brilliant Spectrum game, though, is the way it plays and the St Trinian's-esque details, like riding the bike through the school, shooting water pistols, releasing the mouse to make the girls jump, and of course avoiding the cane of the sinister Mr Whacker. Very fond memories indeed…

JET SET WILLY

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SOFTWARE PROJECTS
» **CREATED BY:** MATTHEW SMITH
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** MANIC MINER

The follow-up game to videogaming legend Matthew Smith's pioneering *Manic Miner* is set within a sprawling mansion (bought with the profits from mining, no doubt) and is both exciting and infuriating in equal measures. Smith showers you with extra lives to assist you in the collection of the 83 flashing objects – and you certainly need them as the difficulty levels in rooms such as the Banyan Tree, Out on a Limb, and the Forgotten Abbey are utterly insane! Smith's *Python*-inspired characters and unforgiving gameplay have secured *Jet Set Willy's* position in the Spectrum's Hall of Fame as well as spawning hundreds of clones, the best of which is probably Elite's *Rollercoaster.*

REBELSTAR

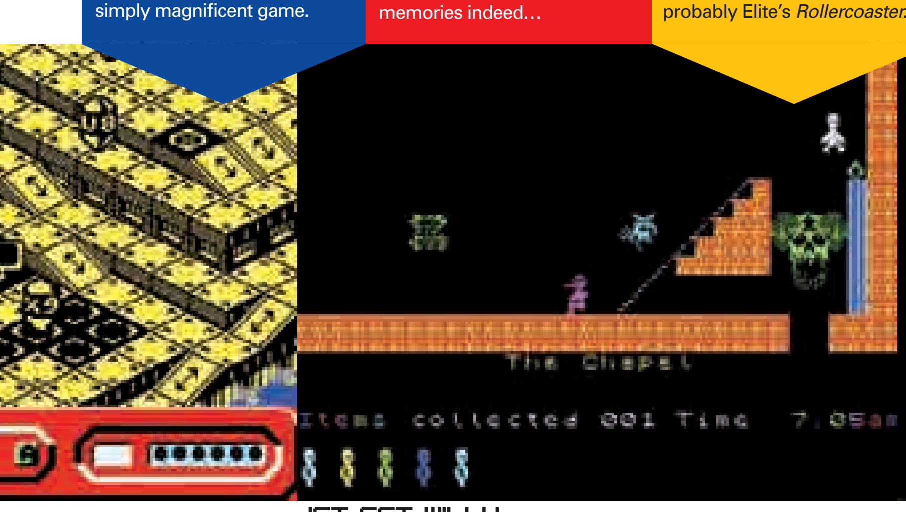
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** JULIAN GOLLOP
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** CHAOS, LASER SQUAD, REBELSTAR 2, REBELSTAR RAIDERS

Just pipping Gollop's earlier masterpiece *Chaos* into our Perfect Ten chart, *RebelStar* is a turn-based science fiction strategy game in which you control either of two opposing forces in a moonbase battle. The game is a remake of the previous *RebelStar Raiders,* but what confirms *RebelStar's* greatness is the pure strategy and cunning that must be employed in order to succeed; making the best of your forces' different abilities and armaments. There was an additional two-player game on the flip-side of the tape – and all for just £1.99! What can you get for £1.99 nowadays? The game was pretty sophisticated for 1986, but the question on our lips is, 'Julian Gollop, where are you now?'

ELITE

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** TORUS
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** GYRON

The results of no top ten chart would have any weight if they didn't feature the obligatory conversion of the ultimate space trading videogame, and this Torus version remains faithful to Ian Bell and David Braben's original vision while at the same time adding a few enhancements. That's if you could actually play the damn thing however, because the seminal *Elite* was the first ever game to utilise the Lenslok anti-piracy copy prevention mechanism which managed to frustrate legitimate customers and pirates in pretty much equal measures. Fortunately, *Elite* was well worth the hassle with its ultra-smooth and flicker free frame rates, impressive magenta explosions, and – for the 128K at least – three special missions.



JET SET WILLY



ELITE



THE SPECTRUM'S POSITION AS THE GENESIS OF MODERN VIDEOGAMING CANNOT BE OVERSTATED – MANY OF THE TODAY'S MOST SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPERS CUT THEIR TEETH ON SIR CLIVE'S FINEST

sinclair ZX SPECTRUM AND THE REST…

01 MATCHPOINT
02 GREEN BERET
03 MAX HEADROOM
04 KNIGHT LORE
05 STOP THE EXPRESS
06 HIGHLANDER
07 STAR WARS
08 BARRY MCGUIGAN WORLD BOXING
09 DUNGEON ADVENTURE
10 LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
11 DUN DARACH
12 TAPPER
13 ROBIN 'O' THE WOOD
14 THE HOBBIT
15 CHUCKIE EGG
16 KNIGHT RIDER
17 SABRE WULF
18 HYPERSPORTS
19 TURBO ESPRIT
20 TLL
21 CYCLONE
22 TRAPDOOR
23 YIE AR KUNG FU
24 STARION
25 THEATRE EUROPE
26 COMMANDO
27 SPIKEY HAROLD
28 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
29 ENDURORACER
30 PSST!
31 CODENAME MAT
32 FEUD
33 3D DEATHCHASE
34 C5 CLIVE
35 GUNFRIGHT
36 THE SENTINEL
37 HARRIER ATTACK
38 ALIEN
39 CONTACT SAM CRUISE
40 ROLLERCOASTER
41 TAU CETI
42 MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG
43 CYBERNOID
44 TECHNICIAN TED
45 DAN DARE
46 KNIGHT-TYME
47 KOKOTONI WILF
48 FAIRLIGHT
49 MANIC MINER
50 LUNAR JETMAN
51 THANATOS
52 WEST BANK
53 TRASHMAN
54 CHAOS
55 UNDERWURLDE
56 MIAMI VICE
57 GLIDER RIDER
58 RAMBO
59 CAULDRON II
60 SAI COMBAT
61 WINTER GAMES
62 INFILTRATOR
63 SABOTEUR
64 WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
65 BUBBLE BOBBLE
66 RENEGADE
67 EXOLON
68 SPY HUNTER
69 ELEVATOR ACTION
70 STARGLIDER
71 CHEQUERED FLAG
72 WHEELIE
73 AMAUROTE
74 DEATHSTAR INTERCEPTOR
75 JACK THE NIPPER
76 COBRA
77 RANARAMA
78 HALLS OF THE THINGS
79 ALL OR NOTHING
80 DYNAMITE DAN II
81 THREE WEEKS IN PARADISE
82 DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON
83 BOBBY BEARING
84 JETPAC
85 ALIEN8
86 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
87 AIRWOLF
88 LIGHTFORCE
89 URIDIUM
90 THRUST
91 ZYNAPS
92 BATMAN
93 SKOOL DAZE
94 I OF THE MASK
95 STARSTRIKE II
96 BARBARIAN


HIGHLANDER
BARBARIAN

Why Don't They Remake…

THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

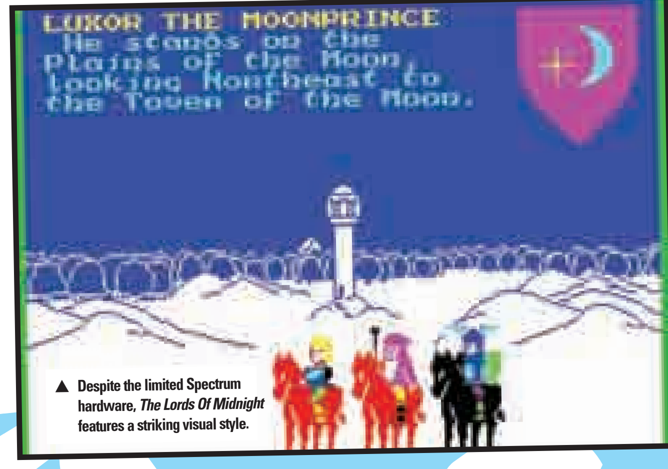
THE WHOLE WORLD OF MIDNIGHT IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND…

Release: **1984**
Format: **Spectrum**
Publisher: **Beyond**
Developer: **Mike Singleton**

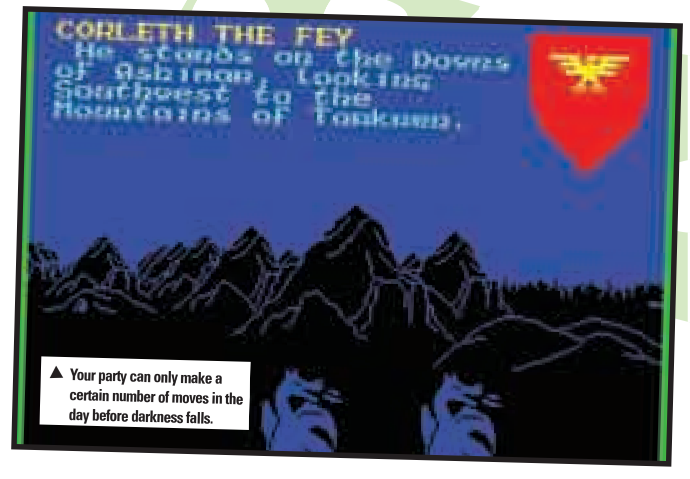
When *The Lords Of Midnight* was released in 1984, the home software market had already grown to such a degree that publishers were resorting to gimmicks to get their increasingly similar products noticed. Every other game was powered by some groundbreaking graphics system or patented 3D trickery that might just melt your brain. So when Beyond billed *The Lords Of Midnight* as, "The world's first epic game", featuring a whizzy new programming technique called 'Landscaping', it was difficult to suspend disbelief, especially as it debuted on the humble Speccy. But creator Mike Singleton happily proved everyone wrong. In terms of story and scope, the game was huge. It came bundled with a 30-page novella that fleshed out the good versus evil battle between Luxor the Moonprince and Doomdark the Witchking, while the frozen world of Midnight was viewed in first-person and spread out over 4,000 separate locations. 'Epic' was the perfect word.

Sequels followed – *Doomdark's Revenge* in 1985 and *The Citadel* belatedly in 1995 – but it's the original game that still holds a spell over fans. Unsurprisingly, talk of an official remake never seems to die down, and in 2003 Singleton spoke publicly about that very subject. "I think the real problem is how best to update the game," he said. "Bringing the graphic quality up to date is relatively easy, but the real problem starts to arise when trying to update the gameplay."

It's here that **games™** would like to suggest a typically common sense solution to Singleton's dilemma. Rather than messing around with the classic original, why not simply port *Lords* to Nintendo DS, the weapon of choice for discerning gamers? Just imagine, in the top screen a panoramic 360-degree view of the icy landscape, eclipsing the Speccy's functional graphics but retaining the strong feeling of 'being there' at the heart of the battle; in the bottom screen an icon-driven interface, similar to that used in *The Citadel*, allowing the player to move, plan strategies, make decisions and interact with other characters. And of course, the DS's stylus would allow players to control events with consummate ease.



▲ Despite the limited Spectrum hardware, *The Lords Of Midnight* features a striking visual style.



▲ Your party can only make a certain number of moves in the day before darkness falls.

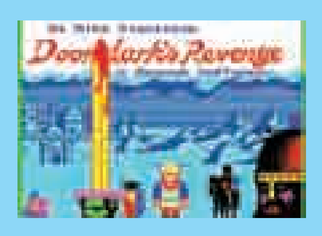
To remain true to the original, the Nintendo DS version would have to retain a turn-based approach over real-time action. Yes, smooth movement from location to location could be displayed, but it would be nothing more than a visual depiction that could be sped up or skipped entirely. After all, *Lords* is a strategy game; it's not about how you get to where you want to go, but rather why you're going there and what you plan to do when you and your troops arrive. The journey is not important.

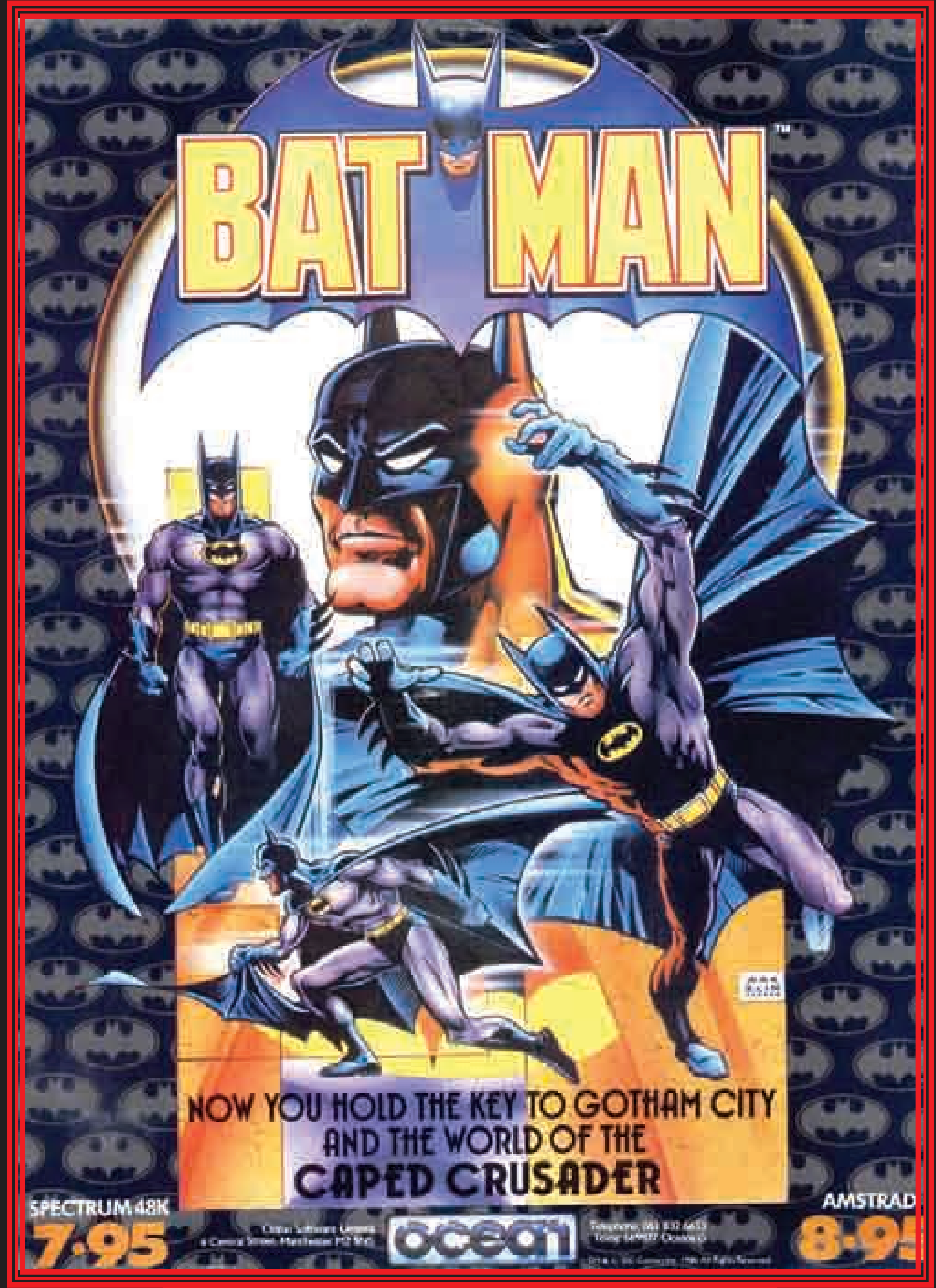
If a faithful handheld version of *Lords* doesn't stir the wannabe warlord inside you, surely the possibility of multi-player campaigns will. DS's Wi-Fi capabilities would enable several players to collaborate on a quest to defeat the evil Doomdark, or even compete to be the first to claim the Ice Crown, Doomdark's source of power. It sounds so perfect it surely can't fail.

As you can probably tell by the froth forming on the page, we're completely and hopelessly sold on the idea of *The Lords Of Midnight* on DS. So Mike Singleton, please end your exile and return to Midnight. Luxor and his devoted legions demand it.

THE THIRD EYE

***The Lords Of Midnight* was planned as the first part of a trilogy, which was followed by *Doomdark's Revenge* and was supposed to finish with *Eye Of The Moon*. However, the concluding chapter never progressed beyond the design stage, and while a third game – *The Citadel* – was eventually released, it was never intended as a substitute for *Eye Of The Moon*. To fill the gap, the DS version could feature the different scenarios to all of the *Lords* games, including *Eye Of The Moon*, making it the complete collection for fans of the series.**





BATMAN [48K Sinclair ZX Spectrum] Ocean, 1986 – Original UK Advert

NEWS RETROSPECTIVE

ZX SPECTRUM:

APRIL 1982 – AUGUST 1983
THE SPECTRUM'S FIRST 18 MONTHS

WHEN SPECTRUM WAS LAUNCHED, NO ONE QUITE EXPECTED IT TO HAVE THE IMPACT IT DID. IT EFFECTIVELY MADE HOME COMPUTING A LOW-COST ENTERTAINMENT MEDIUM RATHER THAN THE NICHE HOBBYIST MARKET IT WAS PREVIOUSLY. THE GOLDEN AGE OF UK COMPUTING HAD BEGUN. TO SATISFY YOUR NOSTALGIA PANGS, HERE'S A BREAKNECK POTTED NEWS ROUND UP OF ZX SPECTRUM'S FIRST 18 MONTHS IN EXISTENCE. HOLD ON TO YOUR RAM PACKS…

APRIL 1982

Over at stand 337 at the Earls Court Computer Fair, Sinclair Research had set ready to uncover its latest creation. ZX Spectrum was unveiled to the visiting masses, and a mixture of curiosity and excitement took hold. Both 16K and 48K versions were on show although it would still be a few weeks before consumers would be able to get their hands on the rubbery little machine… at least, that was the intention.

The price structure for the new computers would start at £125, directly targeting its nearest competitor – BBC Micro model A priced at £299. Clive Sinclair's offer to construct the BBC Micro had been refused, but whether or not this fuelled his objective to undercut and undermine the BBC Micro is not clear. With the two machines very similar in specification, the much lower priced Spectrum was bound to affect sales of the BBC Micro.

MAY 1982

In early May, Sinclair Research announced that it would be taking the first orders for the Spectrum albeit only through its own mail order department. Estimated delivery times were four weeks.



▲ Coming to a show near you… the all-new rubber-based Spectrum.

JUNE 1982

Sinclair Research reported its end-of-year financial figures in June. Turnover up to March 1982 was £27 million with a pre-tax profit of £10 million. The firm also revealed that sales of the ZX81 had broken the 400,000 barrier, and it was planning to produce 20,000 Spectrums a month to meet the initial demand. Little did they know what a poor guesstimate that would be.

Considerable backlogs in production led to huge delays in getting the machines to customers on time. Waiting times varied between 12 to 26 weeks. To soften the blow, Sinclair decided to offer a £10 voucher and a demo tape of programs in apology for the delays.

JULY 1982

July saw one of the first advertised software releases for the Spectrum: The Cambridge Colour Collection, a book and cassette combo released by Richard Altwasser. If that name is familiar it's because the author was also one of the men involved with developing the ZX81 and Spectrum at Sinclair Research.

Altwasser left the company, along with Steve Vickers, in April and formed Jupiter Cantab, producer of the FORTH-based Jupiter Ace, which would make its debut at the Personal Computer World Show in September.

AUGUST 1982

More software houses jumped onto the Spectrum bandwagon with Artic Computing and Abersoft among the first. Melbourne House had just published a series of books for the Spectrum, and Sinclair itself revealed that a Sinclair-branded range of software would be available from September. The collection would feature products written by several software developers.

The Spectrum mail order backlog fiasco hadn't improved, and Sinclair announced that waiting times would be approximately 12 weeks. It also faced the ignominy of the Advertising Standards Agency issuing a warning stating that the Sinclair Spectrum advertisements still maintained a 28-day delivery time.

SEPTEMBER 1982

Bug Byte released *Spectral Invaders* advertised as the very first perfect arcade-quality machine-code game. Another former ZX80/81 software producer, Quicksilva, also released its debut Spectrum offering this month: the *Asteroids* clone, *Meteor Storm*. It was also one of the first Spectrum games to feature speech. Both companies would become a driving force behind the Spectrum software scene in the early years.

Sinclair Research released its first batch of Sinclair-branded software at the Personal Computer World Show, and received a very mixed reception. Titles included *Vu-Calc*, *Biorhythms*, *Chess*, *Space Raiders*, *Hungry Horace* and the *Fun To Learn* series.

The first peripherals from smaller independent firms started trickling into the marketplace. Kempston was one such company that started producing joystick interfaces.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1982

The mail order backlogs had largely been resolved, and any new orders had been processed within a month. Sinclair estimated that 60,000 units had been sold since April. This would increase dramatically over the coming months…

With ZX81 still hugely popular, East London Robotics released a nifty program called ZX Slowloader that would allow the Spectrum to load ZX81 programs.

Kevin Tom's legendary football management game, was released



MAY 1983 CHARTS

1	The Hobbit	(MELBOURNE HOUSE)
2	Black Crystal	(CARNELL SOFTWARE)
3	Time Gate	(QUICKSILVA)
4	Vu-3D	(PSION)
5	Flight Simulation	(PSION)
6	Penetrator	(MELBOURNE HOUSE)
7	Hungry Horace	(PSION/MELBOURNE HOUSE)
8	Avenger	(ABACUS)
9	3D Tanx	(DK'TRONICS)
10	Football Manager	(ADDICTIVE GAMES)

on Spectrum with the added extra of 3D (sort of) graphical highlights.

New peripherals were being released regularly and keyboards were proving popular. DK'Tronics released its ZX Keyboard, and Kayde had a similar product but neither featured a proper space bar. Joystick interfaces and RAM packs were everywhere too.

Not only were hardware add-ons becoming big business, software developers were springing up all over the place. Companies such as CSS, Automata, PSS, Silversoft, Hewson, Lothlorien, Mikro-Gen and New Generation Software were making the switch from ZX81 to Spectrum programming very smoothly.

Sinclair moved away from its mail-order-only sales stance and from the beginning of December, Spectrum would be available from several branches of WHSmith. It also planned to sell software and the massively delayed ZX Microdrive.

JANUARY 1983

Reports on what ZX Microdrive would be like began to surface. The assumption was it would be some form of disk system when, in reality, it was going to be a continuous tape loop in a small cartridge.



▲ Instant game loading with the Interface 2 and ROM cartridge software. Shame there were only ten titles.

With sales of software rising steadily, more major retail outlets began stocking Spectrum titles. WHSmith extended its stock list with John Menzies and Boots also testing the water with limited ranges.

The first adverts for Melbourne House's anticipated graphical adventure of *The Hobbit* started to appear in the computing press.

FEBRUARY 1983

WHSmith again expanded Spectrum availability with 65 large branches now stocking the machine. It upped its software range to 40 titles.



▲ As Spectrum's popularity grew, so too did the catalogue of games.

Sinclair Research's turnover doubled in the space of a year – from £27 million to £54 million – almost solely down to the Spectrum's incredible popularity.

Imagine Software advertised its first two games for Spectrum, the fast-paced shoot-'em-up *Arcadia*, and *Schizoids*. The big boys of software development were coming…

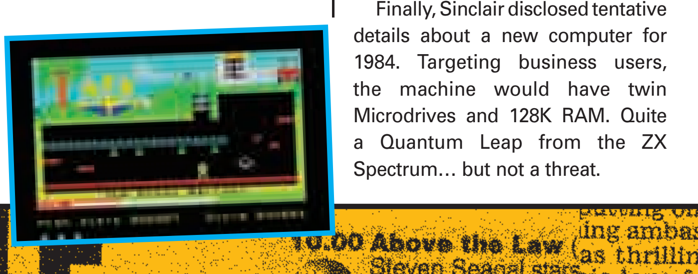
MARCH-APRIL 1983

The latest set of software releases from Sinclair's own-brand label yielded some very familiar names such as *Vu-3D* and the adventure series including *Ship Of Doom* and *Espionage Island*. Also released under the Sinclair banner was *The Hobbit*, which became a huge hit.

New releases in April saw *Master Chess* (Mikro-Gen), *Ah Diddums!* (Imagine), *The Black Crystal* (Carnell) and High Noon (Work Force). Meanwhile Cascade was still pushing its *Cassette 50* compilation and releasing it for virtually any electrical appliance with a microchip.

MAY-JULY 1983

May saw both 16K and 48K Spectrums receive a price cut as the impending threat of newer, cheaper machines grew. With the recently released Oric-1 retailing cheaper than the Spectrum, a price cut had been on the cards. The 16K Spectrum now cost just under £100 with the 48K reduced down to £125.



June, and The Queen's Birthday Honours included a well deserved knighthood for Clive Sinclair.

On into July, and Sinclair revealed that it planned to release an adaptor called Interface Two to run ROM cartridge software on Spectrum. The ROM software, of which only ten titles would be released, was coming during the next few months. The ZX Microdrive was delayed once again, but was promised to be released the following month. By this time it was now almost 18 months overdue.

New software developer, Ultimate: Play The Game announced its first Spectrum creation. Early *Jet Pac* reviews were favourable.

AUGUST 1983

To gasps of amazement, hysteria and mass fainting, the ZX Microdrive and Interface One were finally released. Unfortunately, teething problems with the reliability of the data storage system emerged as the tape spools frequently tangled inside the Microdrive.

Other new releases included DK'Tronics lightpen package and Bug Byte's brand new game, *Styx*, which had been created by a teenager called Matthew Smith. There were good vibes growing around another forthcoming title from Bug Byte and Smith – a platform game called *Manic Miner*. According to sneak previews, it was going to be 'huge'…

In a great month for both company and owner, Sinclair proudly divulged that it had a double celebration having sold 500,000 Spectrums as well as seeing Sir Clive receive his knighthood from The Queen.

Fast forward to early December, as Sir Clive and Sinclair Research celebrate once again by selling their one-millionth Spectrum. Things were definitely on the up…

SEPTEMBER 1983

Ultimate revealed two more software releases, *Atic Atac* and *Lunar Jetman*. Similar to *Jet Pac*, both were well received and sold by the shed load.

Finally, Sinclair disclosed tentative details about a new computer for 1984. Targeting business users, the machine would have twin Microdrives and 128K RAM. Quite a Quantum Leap from the ZX Spectrum… but not a threat.



▲ Corrugated cardboard anyone? The Spectrum boom also attracted some rather quirky accoutrements.

PERIPHERAL VISION

With the launch of the splendid Spectrum came the obligatory avalanche of games and peripherals. Some were good and some were just downright ropey. Here's a sample of some of the stranger Speccy add-ons…

First let's come to the Print-N-Plotter Products Spectrum 'Console'. No, it wasn't a challenger to Nintendo's crown but rather a splendid piece of cardboard. For just £7.50 you could own a piece of corrugated cardboard, folded in such a way that it gave you a mini-workstation effect. It also had a space for your printer or a few tapes. Hey, and this wasn't just any old cardboard either, no, this was double-laminated for years of use… or minutes if you gave it a slap after suffering an infinite death in *Jet Set Willy*.

The Digital Tracer from RD Laboratories was an alternative to a light pen, that worked by tracing your image with a plastic double-armed contraption. The electronic parts of the interface were stored in a housing made out of an old tape case with electrical tape around it. Not fantastic to look at, but it was fully functional and completely in tune with the wave of enthusiasm for new peripherals. Unfortunately it cost £60…

Then there was the Spectrum-Stick from Grant Design. For those without a joystick interface this was the ideal solution. Constructed completely out of flimsy plastic, this clip-on joystick covered the Spectrum's cursor keys (5, 6, 7 and 8) making it rather awkward to use as well as extremely easy to break after little more than a rigorous game of Scrabble.



THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS

Retro Interview

WITH THE RENOWNED SPECTRUM TAKING UP THE WHOLE OF THIS MONTH'S RETRO SECTION AS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF QUARTERLY 'SPECIALS', THESE HALLOWED PAGES WOULDN'T BE COMPLETE WITHOUT IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOME OF THE LEGENDS FROM THE HEART OF THE SPECTRUM GOLDEN YEARS…


▲ Simon Butler ▼ Jon Ritman ▲ Ste Pickford ▼ Bill Harbison

Q. What are your fondest memories of the days when Spectrum ruled?

Simon Butler: There are almost too many fond memories from those days. Bargain games for a few quid that were better than a lot of the dross doled out to punters these days. By 'better' I mean value for money, and enjoyment value. Also, making up the rules as we went along – that was fun. We had no one telling us how things should be done because no one had done it before. I suppose we were the 'avant-garde'.

Jon Ritman: That's a hard one. If I can only pick one moment, it has to be when I introduced my very first AI program to *Match Day* – a whole ten lines of code. The rules were a) If you haven't got the ball run at it and b) If you have got the ball kick it up the pitch. Bear in mind that I was bricking it at the entire idea of writing AI, and you may appreciate my tears of laughter and relief when it scored against me in the first ten seconds.

Ste Pickford: Probably before I started making games [1986], when I was just a fan of videogames, saving my pocket money up to buy the latest *Ultimate* game or whatever. The games that stand out in my memory after all these years are those that managed to evoke a scary or spooky atmosphere – games which made you feel creepy or frightened. That's something that doesn't seem to happen in games these days, and perhaps can't happen with the level of detail and realism we've got now. There isn't space left to use you imagination quite so much in modern games, which is where the strongest emotions come from in the same way that modern, realistic movies can never be as scary or spooky as old black-and-white films.

I remember being completely terrified by a head that appeared in a bush in *Tir Na Nog*. I'd been walking around for hours – getting nowhere in the game – when this floating head briefly appeared then disappeared. It scared me out of my skin. I never got to the bottom of it, and for all I know it might have been a bug, but I really felt I'd encountered a taste of the primal magic of the game world.

I remember a Hewson game called *Avalon* that had a similar effect. It was well written, but very ambitious in terms of the amount it tried to move around the screen, and consequently a bit ropey, but its flaws added to its charm and I can still remember the feeling of fear as I ran between floaty walled rooms chased by monsters.

Elite was another game that had a strong effect on me where I was really caught up in the game world. Police ships were terrifying, and getting caught in witch space when going through hyperspace was a genuinely frightening experience.

Bill Harbison: My fondest memory was messing around with games that I had and changing the graphics. I remember typing out a *Donkey Kong* clone that was printed in a magazine and not being impressed with the graphics (basically guiding a mouse up ladders toward a piece of cheese). I decided to do my own, complete with chest-beating Kong. I even went as far as drawing the cover for the cassette box. I also hacked into *Rebelstar Raiders* and

changed all the soldiers into space marines. It kept me off the streets.

Q. What has been your greatest ever Spectrum triumph and why?

SB: Even though I only did the backstory, the character design and the poster design, I enjoyed my brief association with *Shadowfire*. I got a kick out of *Neverending Story* and *Hunchback: The Adventure*. I enjoyed my solo days with Ian Weatherburn, annoying though he was. We were a good team until his troll-like companion Roy 'Fat Bastard' Gibson reared his lard-filled head, and then everything went pear-shaped.

JR: *Head Over Heels* simply because it was so well liked and I still get fan mail thanking me for it – it was a lot of fun to design as well.

SP: Many people have fond memories of *Feud*, but I actually enjoyed making the Amstrad graphics more than the Spectrum ones, so I can't say that one. I'd have to say the very first Spectrum graphic I ever drew for a game. It was my first day at Binary Design, aged 16, and I was assigned to a darts game that had just started. I was using my brother's 'sprite editor' program and I drew a large animated hand holding a dart based on my own right hand.

The game, *180*, was pretty good, and did well, and the animated hand was an idea unique to our game – other darts games used to light up each number or segment of the board in sequence, and you had to press a button to stop it on the number you wanted. Years later, I'd meet people in the pub who'd played *180*, and I only had to waggle my right hand at them for them to instantly recognise it from the game.

BH: *Chase HQ* was the most rewarding game I worked on, simply because technically it was superior to even the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions. Myself and John O'Brien [*Chase HQ* programmer] even received a fan letter – just one – from a very nice chap saying how much he enjoyed the game and offering his congratulations to us for doing such a great job on the conversion.

Q. So, what is your favourite Spectrum game?

SB: There are far too many to mention. Obviously the *Ultimate* classics are there, but I liked *Chuckie Egg* and *Tir Na Nog*, *Zombie Zombie*, *3D Ant Attack*. It's actually impossible to pick one game and say, 'this one is better than all the others'. We were spoilt for choice back then.

JR: Where do I start – I can't pick just one so I will list a few: *Knight Lore*, *Spindizzy*, *Xeno* (I think it was called that) and *Ant Attack*. There were several more, but I suspect the brain cells that held their names died a decade or more ago.

SP: Blimey. Impossible to say, there were so many great games I played to death over the years. I think the games I played the most were *Penetrator*, *Elite*, *Knight Lore*, *Chuckie Egg* and *The Lords Of Midnight*, but there were dozens more.

BH: Favourite games would have to be *Elite*, *Match Day II*, *Hypersports*, *Highway Encounter* and *The Great Space Race* (only kidding – remember that one?).

Q. What did the Spectrum contribute to the gaming world?

SB: Creativity and enthusiasm that has all but disappeared from the industry today. It spawned a generation of coders and artists who have gone on to some dizzying heights while others have just disappeared. It generated thousands of avid gamers who were passionate about games in a way that is sadly missing where today's console titles are concerned.

JR: It was a period we'll never have again; programmers could take huge risks with game design just because the money involved was so low. Many unusual ideas were born.

SP: Invention. It was a time when the world of videogames wasn't dominated by licences and sequels. Developers were allowed to create videogames rather than merchandise and promotional items for Hollywood and major sports authorities. There was an incredible outpouring of ideas and concepts because of this, particularly on the Spectrum because of its more flexible architecture.

C64 and the other American home computers had hardware features included to help you make games – character screens, smooth scrolling, hardware sprites and so on. While on the face of it these features should make these computers better game machines, in practice they actually limited the range of games on those machines to only those which were suited to sprites floating over a scrolling character background.

Spectrum, on the other hand, merely had a bitmap screen and a processor. If you wanted to move a sprite or scroll the screen, you had to write the code yourself to do it. This had the advantage of filtering out the worst programmers – many of whom ended up on C64 in my experience – as you had to be of a certain standard just to be able to move a sprite around the screen. It didn't impose any particular style of game, because nothing was easier to write than anything else. Sprites were hard, scrolling was hard, star fields were hard, 3D was hard – everything was equally hard.

Consequently, there was a massive variety of game styles, genres and graphical systems in use. I don't think any games machine has such an original, varied and interesting back catalogue as the Spectrum.

BH: It contributed cheap home conversions of established arcade games and gave young programmers the chance to spread their wings creatively and introduce hybrid genre games like the *Dizzy* graphic adventure series and the *Gargoyle* series including *Tir Na Nog*. They also brought full 3D-shaded games to the home market ten years before the big consoles made 3D the norm.

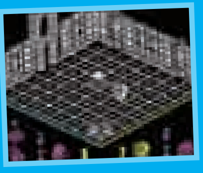
"PROGRAMMERS COULD TAKE RISKS BECAUSE THE MONEY INVOLVED WAS SO LOW"

Q. What did you find was the most frustrating element of working with the Spectrum?

SB: Roy Gibson. But apart from that, I can honestly say I never really got frustrated with the Spectrum. I loved it then and still do now. It was my favourite machine from the early days and it helped me get into WAP game graphics 20 years later. I learned what I know about animation

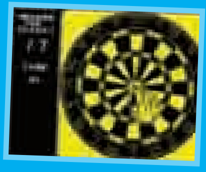
NOW LOADING…

The games that made the legends famous



HEAD OVER HEELS (JON RITMAN)
While Ritman and Drummond had impressed the gaming world with their take on *Batman*, it was their amazing follow up that everyone remembers fondly. Filled to the rafters with incredible level design, some devilishly tricky puzzles and beautifully designed sprites, it's easy to see why Ritman is so pleased with the final product.

180 (STE PICKFORD)
While Spectrum already had its share of darts games, none of them placed you in control of a wobbly dart-throwing hand – until Pickford's *180* came along. Filled with fun touches (special mention goes to the pissing dog) *180* is an enjoyable game that's a lot better than it has any right to be. After all, darts games are supposed to be boring, right?



CHASE HQ (BILL HARBISON)
Along with *R-Type, Chase HQ* on Spectrum is one of the greatest coin-op conversions the machine has ever received. Boasting highly detailed visuals, wonderfully authentic gameplay and great speech (on the 128K version), *Chase HQ* proved that Sir Clive's humble machine was more than capable of mimicking a coin-op that cost thousands of pounds.

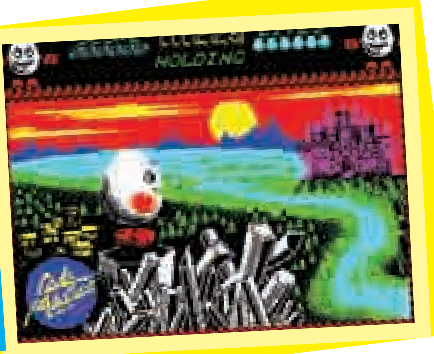
SHADOWFIRE (SIMON BUTLER)
Shadowfire proved an interesting blend of genres, and was like nothing else available on Spectrum when it was released in 1985. An icon-driven experience, you controlled six characters each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Beautifully designed and with a tight 100 minutes *Shadowfire* shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.







▲ Harbison created his own version of *Donkey Kong* complete with a big ape that beat its chest with its fists. Classic.



BITE-SIZE BIOGRAPHY OF A SPECTRUM LEGEND…

SIMON BUTLER
Since his introduction to the industry when he worked on his first title, *Pedro's Garden* (1983) for the ill-fated Imagine Software, Butler has worked on many titles across multiple formats. Games such as *The Neverending Story, Hunchback: The Adventure, Total Recall, Worms* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* are to name but a few. He's worked for such publishers as Ocean, Team 17, Vicarious Visions, Probe, Magnetic Fields and Atari.

JON RITMAN
The legendary Ritman appeared on the scene in 1981 when he released his first game on the Sinclair ZX81, *Namtir Raiders* (his surname spelt backwards). He has created several games that were converted to other platforms such as the Amstrad CPC, C64, MSX, Amstrad PCW and Atari ST. His portfolio consists of classics such as *Match Day I & II, Head Over Heels* and *Batman*. He's worked for Artic, Ocean and Rare/Titus.

STE PICKFORD
Maradona had the 'hand of God', but Ste had the 'hand of 180' – an animation he created for the darts game. He and his brother John have had a roller-coaster ride during their time in the industry, from forming Zippo Games and developing titles for Rare on the NES to being owned by Rare, moving to Software Games, and then leaving to form Zed Two (a nod to Zippo). In 2002 they had to sell to richer neighbours, but Zed Two closed in 2004. Last year, they formed Zee-3 and are self-publishing their games online as The Pickford Brothers.

BILL HARBISON
Another great mind from the Ocean generation, Harbison worked on the amazing *Chase HQ*, as well as *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge, Jurassic Park* and *Lethal Weapon*. From Ocean he moved on to Time Warner Interactive, Candle Light and finally worked for Warthog through a company called Platinum Interactive. After some unpleasant times, he spent a few years out of the industry only to return 18 months ago to Rockpool Games.

while developing for it and it gave me many, many happy hours of gaming fun.

JR: Attributes!

SP: As an artist, the frustration was always with colour. Not only with the limit of only two colours per character square, but also with the limited palette of only eight colours – including black and white. All the other home computers could switch to more colourful modes, perhaps with bigger pixels but with more colours allowed in each character square, and a wider palette of colours. I used to dream of being able to draw something in orange. Another frustration about working on the Spectrum was using micro drives. The most unreliable storage medium ever invented. I used to have to draw every graphic in a game at least three times over the course of development because I'd lose files from the micro drives so frequently.

BH: The lack of colours on the screen and the low screen resolution. This meant that you were significantly restricted creatively and unable to produce the quality of work you could visualise in your mind.

Q. And the most rewarding?
SB: As I said before, I have nothing but fond memories of the Speccy. The colours, or lack of were a tad annoying, but overall it was my machine of choice when developing or gaming.

JR: Simplicity of dealing directly with the hardware and the freedom to avoid any sort of operating system.

SP: I used to work on multiformat games – usually for Spectrum, Amstrad and C64. The Spectrum version always ended up being the main version – the version you wanted to play. Because of the technical difficulties of working on the Spectrum, it tended to attract the better programmers, so that was one reason, but the Amstrad was too slow, and the C64 usually looked crap with its washed-out colours. The Spectrum also had the nicest keyboard for playing games on (I never liked joysticks). So for all those reasons the Spectrum version of the games I worked on was always the one I played the most.

BH: Because there were limitations on the graphical output of the machine, it was all the more impressive if you managed to use the ink and the colour attribute to your advantage and create an attractive loading screen. I remember being in a computer shop when *Chase HQ* was released. I was stood behind two kids who were watching the game load in from tape and when the screen came up on the TV one turned to the other and said, 'Wow! That is one righteous loading screen.' That was funny and at least he could count.

Q. Why do you think the Spectrum remains so popular with gamers?
SB: Because it's British. I've no idea really. There just seemed to be a glut of games out there with hundreds more just waiting to be released every month. *Crash* was our bible and there never seemed to be enough space for all the reviews. With no Internet it was the only salvation if you needed a game tip or even better a map.

It was small and black and sexy, and apart from the horrible dead-flesh keys which gave you the screaming ab-dabs after a while – it was the PlayStation of the time. It kicked ass over C64 as far as I was concerned. There was a certain pompous attitude about Commodore development and those involved. Even though I did graphics for many C64 titles I always preferred the Spectrum. You drew something, and if you were a halfway decent artist then it actually looked like what you intended. C64 graphics? Although he's one of my all-time favourite sprites, just look at Bruce Lee. I rest my case.

JR: [Smiling] It isn't. Just a few odd people think it is.

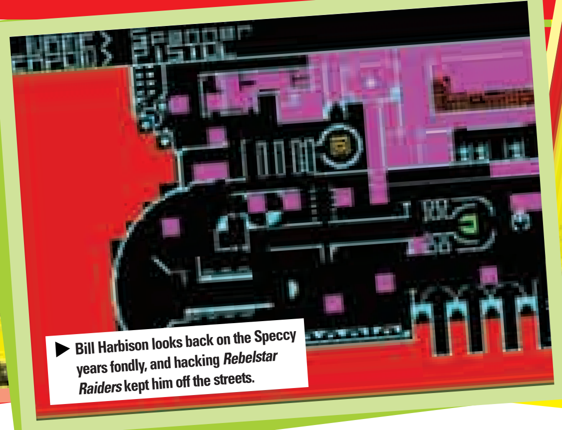
SP: Hmm. Nostalgia, I guess. It seems a pretty even split among people I encounter – Spectrum or C64, with the odd Amstrad fan, and I've re-enacted the old playground arguments in the office a few times. Very few of us were rich enough to own them all as kids, so whichever home computer we had was our favourite.

BH: I think it's because the spectrum played such a big part in the lives of a whole generation of kids in the Eighties and Nineties. It was there when they were growing up and we always look back rapturously on our childhood and how the sun was brighter and the grass was greener. It wasn't, but that's how we recall it.

Q. Do you think bedroom coders can still exist in the industry?
SB: They'll never get rich, but as long as they enjoy what they do, turn out quality product, and entertain people then that's all that matters. The black-hearted bastards who wear the suits and have all-but destroyed the UK game development scene have ensured that the days of the bedroom coders or the cottage industry development teams are well and truly over. May they rot in hell.

JR: While not actually programming in my bedroom, it's only a few feet away. There are a few left who tend to work on very small projects such as embedded games and mobile games.





▶ Bill Harbison looks back on the Speccy years fondly, and hacking *Rebelstar Raiders* kept him off the streets.



"DEAD-FLESH KEYS GAVE YOU THE SCREAMING AB-DABS, BUT IT WAS THE PLAYSTATION OF THE TIME"

SP: I hope so, as I've just become one. I think the mainstream videogame industry has lurched too far toward making only slick, high-budget, safe-bet summer blockbuster-type products, and hasn't allowed or encouraged enough inventive, original, lower budget titles to come through to provide the ideas for the blockbusters of the future. There are plenty of creative developers within the industry, who can't express themselves as part of a 60-man team working night and day to draw a thousand new kits for *FIFA 2007*, or to program the gearshift simulator for licensed car #37 in racing game #58. The only option for these people is to leave the industry completely, and do something more rewarding, or to leave the mainstream game industry and make games as an 'indie'.

So many developers are turning to indie development that I think indies and bedroom coders are going to become an accepted part of the world of videogames providing the stream of new ideas we used to get from regular games in the Spectrum days, but which is missing from the modern videogame industry.

BH: In some ways it's easier now for bedroom coders with the introduction of the Internet. People can get the tools and resources they need, they can get advice on programming for all the way through the project, and when completed they can sell it direct to the customer. I don't think it's enough to make anyone a millionaire, but it can certainly become a healthy living.

Q. What do you think about the Spectrum games that are still being released by individuals like Jonathan Cauldwell, and have you played any of them?

SB: Unfortunately, I don't play any Spectrum games these days. I know precious little about the current Spectrum games, but friends who are 'in the know' tell me great things, so I suppose I should check them out.

JR: I had no idea.

SP: No, I've not played any of them. I think it's insane. The Spectrum is a difficult machine to write for, and incredibly limited. Why put yourself through the pain of making a Spectrum game now when you don't need to? If you're talented enough to make a finished Spectrum game, then you're talented enough to make a game that other people might play. Why hide away on a dead format?

BH: I'd not heard of Jonathan so I decided to Google him. It looks like a lot of fun, but I'm not sure how popular it is.

Q. What has been the defining moment of your career?

SB: I remember many years ago that Gary Bracey ran a computer store in Liverpool long before he became my lord and master at Ocean, and I called in with Ian Weatherburn to buy some blank discs. Gary's shop was cram-packed with kids, and he got me to autograph some copies of *Shadowfire*. While far from 'defining', it always stuck with me. It was one of the first times I met Gary, and although it embarrassed me somewhat being put on the spot like that it made me realise that kids really enjoyed what I did for a living. I recently got a job with a mobile games company working in France and the boss rattled off games I had worked on saying that I was one of the guys who was instrumental in him getting into the industry. Contrary to what my father always thought, maybe I haven't wasted the last 25 years of my life after all.

JR: *Match Day* – the fact that six months after a brief conversation with David Ward of Ocean (that I barely remembered) he phoned up and said, 'that football game you said you were going to write, did you do it?' I then confirmed it was a couple of weeks from completion and he instantly offered me a huge amount for it – well it seemed it at the time.

SP: I hope it hasn't happened yet. I've never had a big hit game, and never made a lot of money, both of which I'm still working on. [He laughs.] I'm still making games, and learning more and more with every game I work on. The Pickford Brothers' latest game – *Naked War* – is the best game we've ever made, and I'm confident that the next game we write after that will be even better. I'm looking to the future, not the past.

BH: I think it was being invited with a few workmates to the press premiere of *Jurassic Park* at Leicester Square – it was certainly an experience.

Q. And finally, what was the biggest mistake of your career, if any?

SB: Probably not learning one of the many 3D packages out there. I wouldn't have bounced around the industry as much as I have, and would more than likely have had a lot more stability in my life. But I was a 2D guy back then and that's what I am today. I'm the last dinosaur.

JR: I really should have started up my own company early and published myself.

SP: I can't really pick anything. That's not to say that I haven't made any mistakes – I have. I think I've made every mistake it's possible to make in this business. I regretted them at the time, but with hindsight the regret melts away. Every mistake I've made has taught me something which has helped me out further along the line.

I think I'm pretty good at making games now, after 20 years, because I've learnt the hard way how not to make games by getting wrong everything it's possible to get wrong on one game or another. I've made mistakes in business and missed opportunities, but every mistake has lead me to where I am today. Okay, I'm skint, but I'm making the best game I've ever made, and enjoying every minute of it, and I'm looking confidently to the future.

BH: Deciding to leave the industry a few years ago after the local job scene dried up. I spent 18 months doing a proper job, and I hated it. Thankfully, I'm back in the industry working at Rockpool Games in Manchester with a few of my old colleagues, some of whom I've known for over 18 years.



A little game called *Match Day* proved the defining moment of Jon Ritman's shining career. ▶



CAULDWELL CAPERS

Amazingly, Spectrum games are still being released for Sir Clive's revolutionary home computer, and thanks to dedicated companies like Cronosoft it's still possible to buy tape-based games that will work in your ancient 8-bit machines. While Cronosoft now has a number of talented programmers on its books, Jonathan Cauldwell is easily the most well known, releasing a number of titles under the Cronosoft label. The talented programmer has been creating games on the ZX Spectrum for the last 17 years and has worked all sorts of miracles with the computer's limited hardware. With this in mind, let's take a look at some of his more notable titles.

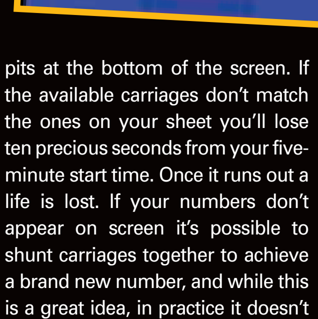
LOCOBINGO

Price: £2.99
Released: 2005
Size: 48K



Fans of Cauldwell will be fully aware of his love of fusing different genres into exciting new gameplay experiences. And so it comes as something of a surprise that the intriguingly named *LocoBingo* isn't quite up to his usual high standards. Don't get us wrong, the concept is sound, the graphics are perfectly functional and the gameplay mechanics are intriguing, it's just that it doesn't gel anywhere near as well as it should.

Essentially, you must knock off a certain amount of numbers from your bingo card that's displayed in the top right-hand corner of the screen. Numbered carriages drop down from the ceiling and you must use your train to shunt them to the pits at the bottom of the screen. If the available carriages don't match the ones on your sheet you'll lose ten precious seconds from your five-minute start time. Once it runs out a life is lost. If your numbers don't appear on screen it's possible to shunt carriages together to achieve a brand new number, and while this is a great idea, in practice it doesn't actually work all that well.



You see, while your train is fairly nimble (it can jump, for goodness sake), some of the carriages fall in impossible-to-reach places and simply waste precious time as you can't actually reach them – an annoying oversight that could have been easily corrected.

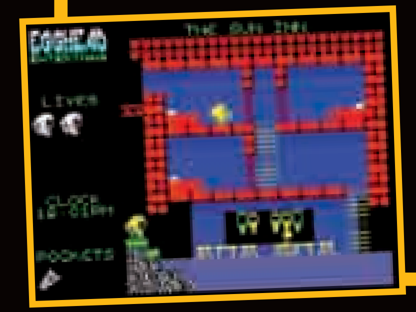
Still, it plays as well as can be expected, and while it's not a patch on the likes of the spectacular *Egghead Entertains* or the amazing *GameX*, it's definitely worth a play through if you're a follower of Cauldwell's work.



Price: £2.99
Released: 2006
Size: 48K

EGGHEAD 4: EGGHEAD ENTERTAINS

Egghead may not be as popular a name as Miner Willy or Sabre Man, but his legion of fans would likely argue that he's equally as important as his more famous peers. Initially starting off as a free game on the cover of *Crash* magazine, Cauldwell's creation has now appeared in four adventures, with his most recent, *Egghead Entertains*, being the best of the bunch.



This latest eggy adventure sees the plucky little hero cleaning up his huge *Jet-Set-Willy*-inspired house, and features all the things that you would expect from one of Matthew Smith's classic games, albeit with one important difference. Egghead is a lot more agile than the ancient miner and is able to change his direction mid jump. Now, this may not sound all that important, but for an 8-bit Speccy game it makes a huge difference and means that you don't have to commit yourself every time you make a leap of faith.

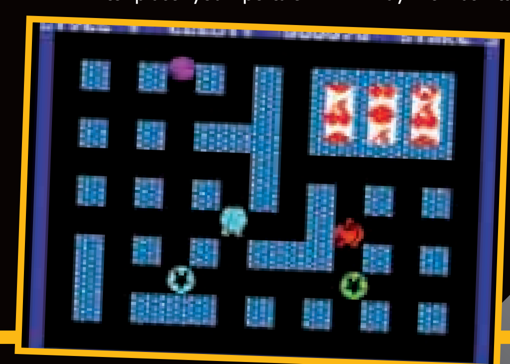
Of course, there will always be those that bemoan the fact that *Egghead* doesn't require you to make pixel-perfect jumps, but in our eyes it's a godsend and impacts greatly on the way you tackle each screen. As for the screens themselves, well, they're not quite as well designed as the aforementioned *Jet Set Willy* or titles like *Dynamite Dan*, but they're still very good, and the ability to pick up objects and use them *Dizzy*-style in new locations adds a further level of depth to Cauldwell's game. This is how we likes our eggs – if only Egghead didn't look like a walking scrotum.

THE FANTASTIC MR FRUITY

Price: £2.99
Released: 2005
Size: 48K

Combining a *Pac-Man*-style maze game with a fruit machine may sound like the barmiest idea since Wile E Coyote started subscribing to the Acme company, but Jonathan Cauldwell's loopy game actually works. Mr Fruity has to collect his fruit, but they have all grown legs and an attitude and no longer want to be harvested. Fortunately, by pressing the 'fire' button you can open up a portal to another orchard and set the fruit machine reels spinning. Once the reels stop, the portal explodes and flies off in up to four directions. Should a fruit get hit and it matches the ones that appear on the reel they instantly become normal fruit that can be collected. As with your regular fruit machines, every time you spin the reels it's possible to change your stake, but be careful as a large amount could see you ending with a score in the minus figures.

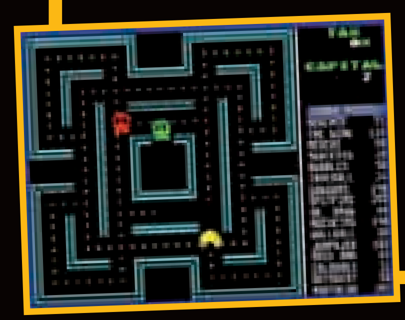
It sounds complicated, but it really isn't, and you'll soon be running frantically around the fairly decently designed mazes in order to place your portals in the most convenient locations. Mr Fruity and his on-screen enemies may well be little more than mis-shapen blobs, but *The Fantastic Mr Fruity* really doesn't need exceptional visuals, it just requires some brilliant fun and solid gameplay and it has that by the bucketload.



Price: £2.99
Released: 2006
Size: 48K

GAMEX: THE GAME EXCHANGE

Cauldwell's latest game just so happens to be his very best. Hell, it's easily one of the most enjoyable games we've played on the Spectrum in an age, and truly deserves to stand tall next to the likes of *Manic Miner* and *Knight Lore*.



Effectively, *The Game Exchange* is 16 mini-games crammed into an impressive 48K. The games themselves are all based on classic titles, *Pac-Man*, *Robotron*, *Lunar Lander* and so on, but have been put together with so much care and attention to detail that you can almost feel the love.

Starting off with *The Muncher*, Cauldwell's own take on *Pac-Man*, the aim is to move around the screen and secure a set amount of capital. Once gained, you can then buy shares in any of the 16 available games, and then play them once the dividends are due. It's possible to pause each game while you play them, which will enable you to continue buying and selling your shares, so make sure each sale is as profitable as possible.

The stock side of *GameX: The Game Exchange* takes a fair while to get your head around and could quite easily have been dropped seeing as how it's the weakest part of the game. Fortunately, the mini-games are by and large superb and are easily worth the £3 asking price. Many have likened *The Game Exchange* to *WarioWare*, and while it's not exactly in the same league as the hallowed Game Boy Advance title, it's still an incredible accomplishment that needs to be in your library, like, yesterday.

For more information on the talented Jonathan Cauldwell head on over to his website at members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/
Jonathan's games can be purchased in tape form at Cronosoft (www.cronosoft.co.uk), or in image form at Retro-Soft (http://www.retro-soft.co.uk/games2.htm).

Retro



Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Sure, Miner Willy and his platforming japes were all well and good, but our 8-bit hero was far more exciting. Say hello to Sabre Man…

CRY WULF

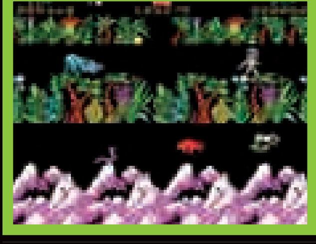
When Rare announced that *Sabre Wulf* was being remade for Game Boy Advance we made wee in our pants. The idea of a huge, roaming adventure with improved gameplay mechanics and aesthetics was almost too much to bear and we constantly stood vigil by the games™ mailbag.

Sadly, when *Sabre Wulf* did arrive it turned out to be a rather sorry affair that shared little in common with the original game. A shame really, as Rare had paid plenty of loving tribute to both the original *Sabre Wulf* and other Ultimate titles, with references to many of its past hits. If only it had shown the same attention with the gameplay…



▲ The game's humour and appeal remains.

Release: 1984
Format:
Spectrum, various 8-bits
Publisher:
Ultimate: Play The Game
Developer:
Chris & Tim Stamper



▲ You reckon that little stick is going to stop this Wulf?



▲ One piece down, three to go.

To many, Rare now seems a shadow of its former self, a company unlikely to ever reach the heights that it's so drastically fallen from. Whatever your current opinions of the Twycross-based developer, there can be no denying that Chris and Tim Stamper were once kings of the gaming world, and it all began on the humble ZX Spectrum.

Back in 1984 the Stamper Bros were on a roll. Their first title *Jetpac* met with instant critical and commercial success with *Atic Atac*, *Psst* and *Tranz Am* all following that. Yes, four titles in one year; Rare was quite prolific with its releases once upon a time…

While the hits continued, one title appeared that perhaps above all other 8-bit releases summed up everything about the company that would become Rare: *Sabre Wulf*. It was an important release for a number of reasons, and not just because you could whack the arse of a rhino or hippo if it was foolish enough to get in your way. For like many other companies of the time, Ultimate's games initially sold for £5.50 – a little higher than the usual, but still great value for money considering how finely polished they were. *Sabre Wulf*, though, sold for a staggering £9.95. It made little difference, critics and the public went mad for it and Ultimate had another hit on its hands.

Popular Spectrum magazine *Crash* even went so far as to say that *Sabre Wulf* was, "State-of-the-art Spectrum software," and eventually gave it a rating of 'un-rateable'. Play *Sabre Wulf* for any length of time and it's easy to see why the Newsfield-published magazine went nuts over it. Of course, another important nugget of information that you should add to the part of your brain that stores all that videogame stuff is that *Sabre Wulf* was the first published Ultimate game to star the eponymous Sabre Man. Kitted out with a dashing pith helmet and a handy sabre, his objective was simple: collect four pieces of a missing amulet, navigate the expansive jungle and stay well away from the titular Sabre Wulf.

Starting off in the centre of the vast, many-screened jungle, Ultimate's game blew you away with its scale and detail. *Atic Atac*, which *Sabre Wulf* drew many comparisons with, may have boasted an impressive 130-odd screens, but *Sabre Wulf* managed a staggering 256, each one glorious to behold and full of all manner of dangerous beasties. From giant spiders to snapping lizards to slithering snakes, *Sabre Wulf*'s jungle was alive with dangerous fauna – particularly the aforementioned hippos and rhinos – that, like Sabre Wulf, were impervious to strikes from your sabre. Angry natives would join in the hunt for the intrepid explorer, and, like the larger animals, couldn't be harmed, meaning nifty footwork was needed in order to flee them. While it was



Villagers' huts were a harsh reminder that Sabre Man wasn't alone.

"THE SPRITES CONTAIN MORE LIFE THAN A DOZEN KAMEOS"

often all too easy to succumb to the beauty of Ultimate's jungle and simply take in the sights, Ultimate was having none of it and had created a flickering flame that would slowly home in on you. Even today the ominous sound it made sends shivers down our spine.

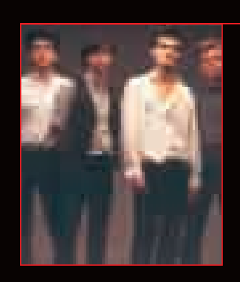
Orchids were another mechanic introduced to ensure you kept moving. They came in a variety of colours, each specific plant bestowing you with help or a handicap. While the blue orchid would greatly speed you up and give you limited invulnerability, other plants would strip you of your powers or reverse your controls. Despite the fact that many of the plants would cause you more pain than pleasure, they were worth seeking out as the invulnerability they often granted enabled you to bypass some of the more treacherous screens and get deeper into *Sabre Wulf*'s vast jungle.

Even today, the game is a delight to play, and while its simple looking visuals are crudely animated and boast none of the sophistication of Rare's recent output, the sprites themselves contain more character and life than a dozen *Kameos* ever could. It isn't an easy game, and discovering all 256 screens will take a lot of luck, but if you can track it down, you'll find *Sabre Wulf* an utterly captivating experience. Now let's see an enhanced version appear on Xbox Live Arcade.





OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1984



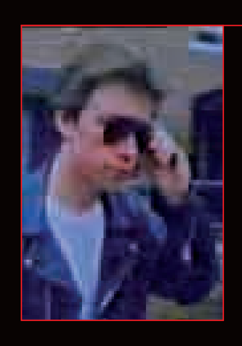
ON THE RADIO

Dubbed by some the most miserable group of all time, The Smiths were nonetheless an important band. Morrissey's lyrics, despite perfectly capturing everyday life, were often misunderstood by his detractors who felt his songs were too whiney and full of angst. All we'll say on the matter is put *How Soon is Now?* on full blast and kiss your cares goodbye.



AT THE MOVIES

1984 was when *Ghostbusters* appeared in multiplexes the world over. Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd and the wonderful Bill Murray starred as the titular busters while Ivan Reitman held the director reigns. With a catchy theme tune by Ray Parker Jr, outrageously good effects and plenty of guffaw-inducing moments, *Ghostbusters* was a massive hit that still stands up today.



ON THE TELEVISION

What do you do when one of the most popular characters in *Grange Hill* grows up and leaves school? If you're writer Phil Redmond, you simply create a brand new spin-off series for him. And so we have *Tucker's Luck* with Todd Carty continuing his role as the wisecracking Tucker. Many episodes consisted of nothing more than Tucker and his mates chasing girls and hanging out at the local youth club, but that didn't stop us loving it.



No chance to relax, there'll be loads of monsters here soon.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

Collectors!

If you have a gaming collection worthy of these pages then get in touch with gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

ALL THE WAY FROM HASTINGS IN EAST SUSSEX, THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS 35-YEAR-OLD LEIGH HILLS, A MAN WHO CONSIDERS HIMSELF MORE OF A RETRO HISTORIAN THAN A RETRO GAMER, AND GOING BY HIS COLLECTION WE CERTAINLY WON'T ARGUE. LEIGH, A REGISTERED NURSE, HAS 110 CONSOLES IN VARIOUS GUISES FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND MORE THAN 5,000 GAMES. IMPRESSIVE, MOST IMPRESSIVE…



▼ He would gladly display Miyamoto's brain on a plinth, given half a chance. There's a law against stuff like that y'know, Leigh.

games™: How did your interest in games start?
Leigh Hills: A school friend got an Atari 2600 for his birthday (I was about eight) and I remember playing *Combat* and *Space Invaders* every day after school with him. My parents bought me a 16K Spectrum for my twelfth birthday, and from that moment on I was hooked playing the likes of *Horace Goes Skiing* and *Jet Pac*.

g™: How long have you been collecting?
LH: About ten years now. I never used to sell my old consoles when the latest console came out, so I had a few machines before I even consciously made the decision to collect the ones I wished I had when I was younger. Having a disposable income in my mid-twenties helped too. I don't necessarily consider myself a retro gamer as many of the games I play today are recent titles, but there's a part of me that wants to archive the history of gaming so far and preserve it for the future.

g™: Where do you buy most of your stuff?
LH: It used to be primarily boot fairs, but now it's a lot harder to find the really good stuff because people are more aware of the value of old consoles and games, and stick them on eBay instead. It doesn't stop me going out at the crack of dawn every Sunday though, as there are still some gems out there. eBay is a fantastic source for some lovely things and I'm always on the lookout for particular games or systems to complete parts of my collection. I also try to anticipate what current-generation games will be worth having in years to come and get them in my collection before their value rises.

g™: What consoles do you own?
LH: I have 110 consoles/games systems in my collection. This sounds a lot, but that includes variations of systems such as the Spectrum 48K and 128K. As a collector, I'm only really interested in a console if it's complete, in its original box and in at least 'good' condition, but I do have a few rare machines that I'm just happy to have – with or without box. I have everything from Magnavox Odyssey to DS Lite, but there are still loads of obscure machines I would love to track down.



g™: How many games do you own?
LH: Thousands. I have them all catalogued in a database so that I can keep tabs on what I have, although I seem to remember what I have for each console anyway. I'm quite fussy about the condition of my games. They have to be complete and in excellent condition because I personally think that getting a game out of its original packaging and reading the manual or looking at the artwork before playing enhances the gaming experience. I guess this is the same as a record collector wanting vinyl in its original sleeve as opposed to a copy of the album on cassette. And it's for this reason that I don't tend to play many emulators.

g™: What is your favourite console and game?
LH: That's a tough one to answer; there are several contenders for that accolade. I love N64, Mega Drive (including Mega CD; 32X etc) and Dreamcast.





With this many games, it's a damn good job Leigh has them all catalogued in a very impressive database.



If pushed I would probably say N64 as there were so many triple-A titles that came out for it, such as *Mario 64*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *Pilotwings 64* and *GoldenEye*. I also have a soft spot for an obscure Japanese computer/console called the Sord M5 and have amassed quite a collection of boxed carts for it.

gTM: What is your most prized videogame possession and why?

LH: Another toughie, but I have two brand-new condition Game & Watches that have been signed by Shigeru Miyamoto (*Zelda* and *Donkey Kong*). They are prized because I got the chance to meet him when he made his one and only public appearance in England in 2003 and he signed them for me, so they are a perfect memento of the occasion. They're unique.

gTM: What is your favourite game ever?

LH: It depends on how I think about what defines a great game: the length of time I played a game for or the feeling I got when playing a particular game. I would have to say that *Half-Life 2* is probably the most stunning and enjoyable game I've ever played. But if I could only have one game to play ever it would be something like *Championship Manager* or *Pro Evolution Soccer* because it's different every time you play – the story is created in your head and not by the development team.

gTM: What is your favourite gaming series?

LH: I would have to say *The Legend Of Zelda*. It's a bit of a cliché, I know, but *Zelda* games don't appear at the top of most gamers' all-time favourite games. You know that you're in for a first-rate platform adventure with RPG elements, a memorable soundtrack and some innovative Nintendo feature that every other game developer who writes a platform game will subsequently copy.

gTM: What item is missing from your collection?

LH: Shigeru Miyamoto's brain on a plinth perhaps? There's always going to be something missing from my collection, which in some respects is the beauty of collecting videogames. It's possible to concentrate on completing games for a particular console – I have every PAL N64, Dreamcast and Mega Drive game, for example – but there will always be something else that tweaks me. I am after a decent boxed copy of *Darxide* for the 32X and I am missing some Master System and Mega CD games, but I really want a UK copy of *Dive Alert: Becky's Version* to complete my NeoGeo Pocket collection.

gTM: Have you ever discovered a real bargain?

LH: Oh yes, quite a few over the years. I was particularly excited to find my UK version Magnavox Odyssey in a junk shop for £35 about eight years ago, complete with everything that should have been in the box – I've managed to track down six boxed games for it since too. I have picked up boxed Game & Watches such as *Ball*, *Judge* and *Rain Shower* for a quid or two at boot fairs over the years, which always makes it worth sacrificing a Sunday morning lie-in for. My other half Lisa is also brilliant at spotting a bargain and has found some great stuff for me.

gTM: Are you an Xbox, PlayStation or Nintendo guy?

LH: They all have their merits, I play on the current generation of consoles pretty evenly. However, I do have a soft spot for Nintendo simply for its sheer innovation and contribution to gaming over the years. Imagine what we might be seeing if Gunpei Yokoi was still around today.



A nice selection of Virtual Boy gear, and it's not even his favourite console.



All the consoles. This man has all the consoles.







BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50

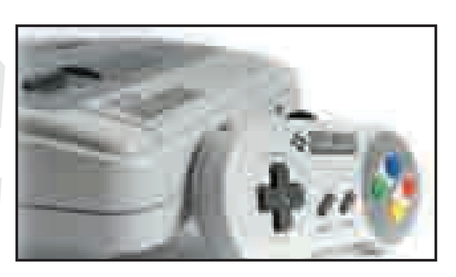


MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

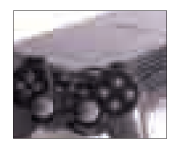
SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35

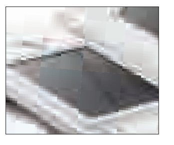
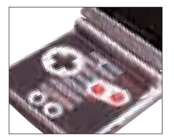

eMag

PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS






TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX 360 TEN MUST-HAVE GAMES

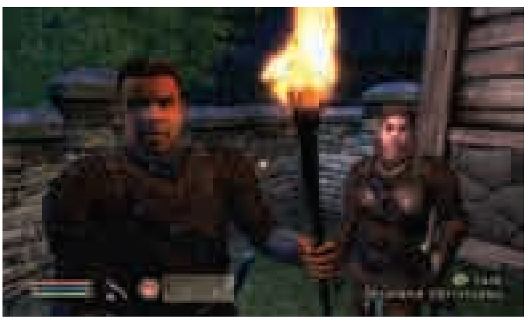
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Bethesda
Genre: Action-RPG
Price: £49.99

True immersion is something that very few games can genuinely offer. No matter how realistic the visuals or how 'free roaming' a city is, it's often hard to escape the fact that you're merely playing a game. That said, *Oblivion* comes closer than most to managing it and – with a lack of anything else like it – is an essential title for 360 at this time. Afternoons slip away, evenings become mornings, and we're still finding plenty of mischief to get up to. Should we buy another house? Should we kill everyone? Will we ever get to the end of the Dark Brotherhood campaign? We'll probably do all these things – we just need to find the time…

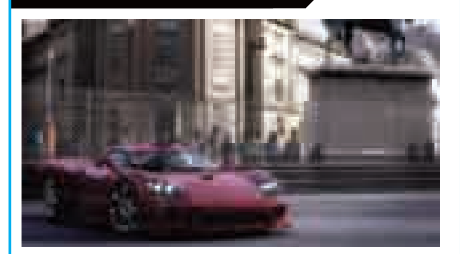
ISSUE: **43** SCORE: **9**

1


2 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Bizarre Creations
Genre: Racing Price: £49.99



PGR2 wowed us all when it arrived on Xbox, so big things were expected for the 360 sequel. Of course, as expected, Bizarre Creations delivered in every way and *Gotham 3* is the racing game we've always wanted to play. Frankly, this is only likely to be bettered by *Project Gotham Racing 4*.

ISSUE: **39** SCORE: **9**

3 GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Price: £49.99

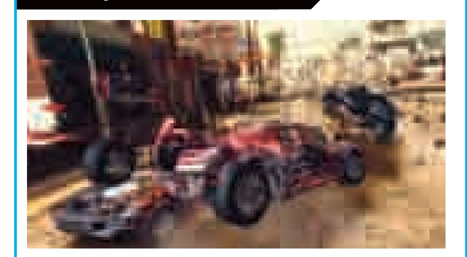


One of the first truly next-generation titles to arrive on Xbox 360, *GRAW* took the stealth of its predecessors, added a smidgeon of *Rainbow Six* styling and produced incredible eye candy for the single-player, and addictive action for the multi-player. The best of its kind since *Black Arrow*.

ISSUE: **45** SCORE: **9**

4 BURNOUT REVENGE

Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Criterion
Genre: Racing Price: £49.99

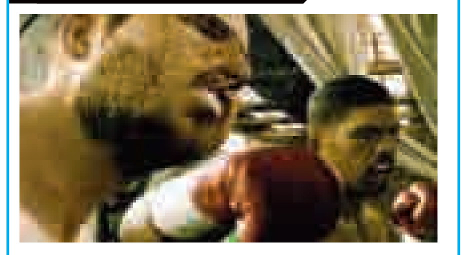


It may be the same as the one on Xbox, but *Burnout Revenge* is a near-perfect racer and there are few faster games. It's up to you whether you purchase the 360 version for little more than a graphical overhaul and some bonus Live options, but if you haven't played at all then it's a must-buy.

ISSUE: **37** SCORE: **9**

5 FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3

Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports Price: £49.99

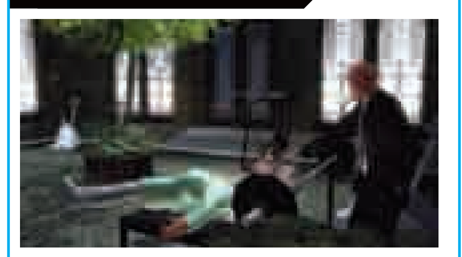


It may sound brutal, but punching people in the face really hard is astonishingly satisfying. We've only realised to what extent since playing this superb boxing title. Easily the best in the series to date, you'd be fairly foolish to miss out on the best this particular sport has to offer.

ISSUE: **42** SCORE: **8**

6 HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Publisher: Eidos Developer: IO Interactive
Genre: Action Price: £49.99



Hitman has entertained us for a long time, but we've had niggles with each. *Blood Money* corrects any errors and, although still not perfect, provides an amazingly deep title that offers far more in the way of variation and choice than most titles that pride themselves on these things can offer.

ISSUE: **45** SCORE: **8**

7 CALL OF DUTY 2

Publisher: Activision Developer: Infinity Ward
Genre: Action Price: £49.99

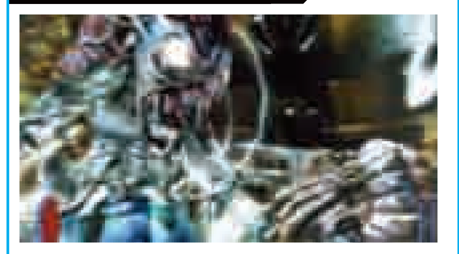


This 360 launch title is still played to excessive levels on Xbox Live thanks to its cracking level designs, lobby system updates, copious new levels to download and its pure, frenetic multi-player action. The single-player is no slouch either, and provides a superb gaming experience.

ISSUE: **39** SCORE: **8**

8 PREY

Publisher: 2K Games Developer: Venom Games
Genre: First-Person Shooter Price: £49.99

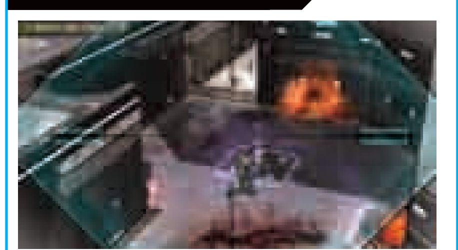


We're hard to impress, but this is the most original and exciting FPS we've seen in a long time. The experience may be slightly marred by the 'invincible' lead character, but the game's sheer innovation and design mean that if you haven't played *Prey*, you're missing out on a lot.

ISSUE: **46** SCORE: **8**

9 QUAKE 4

Publisher: Activision Developer: Id Software
Genre: First-Person Shooter Price: £49.99

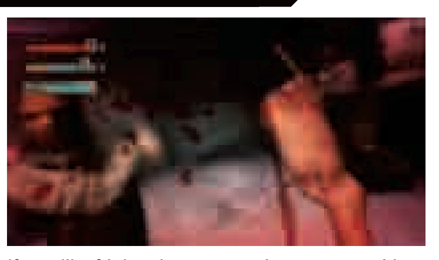


Despite being one of the earlier titles for 360 and with many moaning that it's no more than a PC port, there's no denying that *Quake 4* pushes all the buttons that a first-person shooter should. The real treat comes when you take it on Live and start dealing damage to your Friends List.

ISSUE: **38** SCORE: **8**

10 CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Publisher: Sega Developer: Monolith
Genre: Horror Price: £49.99



If you like frights then you can't go wrong with *Criminal Origins*. The team responsible for the superb *F.E.A.R.* on PC brings another superb horror FPS that provides action and scares in equal quantities. The section in the shopping mall will haunt us for the rest of our little lives.

ISSUE: **39** SCORE: **7**

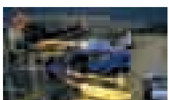
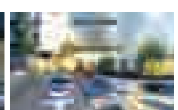
PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

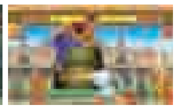
BURNOUT 3

What Electronic Arts and Criterion managed to achieve with the third instalment in the massively successful *Burnout* series is incredible. There is simply no good reason for you not to own this game.

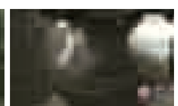
STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY EDITION

A magnificent collection of some of the finest 2D beat-'em-ups ever made – all of which feature dirty Ken. The Xbox version even includes the superb *Third Strike* as a bonus. Need we say any more?

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

As long as you don't mind killing mostly harmless, lumbering, giant beasts then it's extremely difficult not to marvel at the detail, sheer scale and emotion captured within this gorgeous title.

ALIEN HOMINID

There are those that feel that 2D platforming is dead. Those people are wrong. *Alien Hominid* not only shows how addictive the genre can be but also how much is possible on a somewhat limited budget.




Title	Publisher	Developer	Issue	Score
XBOX Ten Must-Have Games				
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE	38	8
Burnout 3	Electronic Arts	Criterion	23	10
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	26	9
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	N/A	8
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo	18	8
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	28	9
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	24	8
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	22	8
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	N/A	8
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	29	8
PLAYSTATION2 Ten Must-Have Games				
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	8	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	12	8
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	30	8
God Of War	Sony	In-House	32	9
Guitar Hero	RedOctane	Harmonix	40	9
Ico	Sony	In-House	N/A	9
Rez	Sega	UGA	N/A	8
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House	39	9
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	N/A	8
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	5	8
PLAYSTATION PORTABLE Ten Must-Have Games				
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion	37	9
Football Manager 2006	Sega	In-House	N/A	8
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House	39	8
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment	28	8
LocoRoco	Sony	In-House	46	9
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios	32	8
Metal Gear Ac!d 2	Konami	In-House	44	7
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House	39	7
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco	28	8
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House	31	8
NINTENDO GAMECUBE Ten Must-Have Games				
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	1	8
Alien Hominid	O3 Entertainment	The Behemoth	27	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	N/A	8
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	10	9

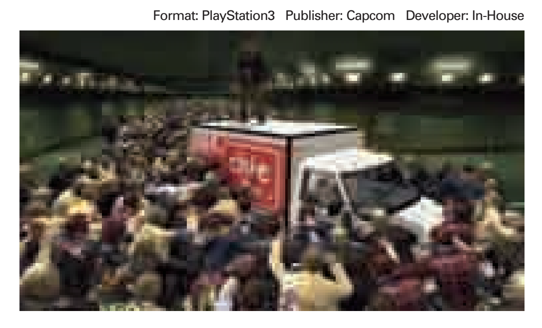
ON THE HORIZON

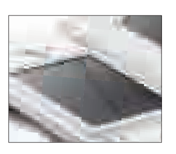
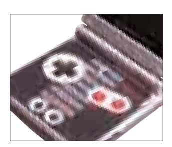
THEY MAY NOT BE HERE JUST YET, BUT WE FEEL THAT

DEAD RISING

Format: PlayStation3 Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-House

We've spent many months drooling over screenshots and videos of Capcom's upcoming zombie-fest, but we've had hands-on time with playable code now, so we know exactly how good *Dead Rising* is likely to be and exactly how fun it is maiming hordes of undead. It seems to us that Capcom is ready to deliver on all the promises that have been made, and in a few more weeks we'll be able to see exactly what's on offer. We truly can't wait.



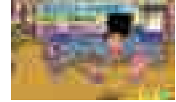
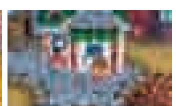
       

EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	2	8
killer7	Capcom	In-House	34	9
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	2	10
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	5	9
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	29	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	24	8
NINTENDO DS Ten Must-Have Games				
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House	40	8
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House	29	8
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs	31	8
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House	39	7
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment	31	9
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House	37	7
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis	37	8
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom	23	8
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Nintendo	Atlus	39	8
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success	30	8
NINTENDO GBA Ten Must-Have Games				
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House	8	9
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House	6	8
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream	14	9
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	22	7
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House	17	8
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House	11	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish	1	8
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's island	Nintendo	In-House	N/A	8
The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	In-House	25	7
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House	31	8
PC Ten Must-Have Games				
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	DICE	34	9
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios	21	8
Football Manager 2006	Sega	Sports Interactive	N/A	9
Grim Fandango	LucusArts	In-House	N/A	8
Guild Wars	NCsoft	AreaNet	33	8
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software	N/A	9
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios	39	9
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Digital Extremes	18	8
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucusArts	N/A	9
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard	30	9

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

This is the kind of game that the DS is best suited to. It may have a lot in common with the GameCube *Animal Crossing*, but being able to play on the move and online breathes new life into the title.

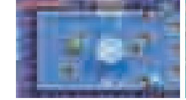
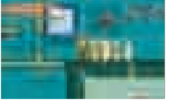
TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

Innovation has been talked about a lot recently – especially when Nintendo is being discussed – but *Trauma Center* truly shows what the company is capable of when let loose with new control systems.

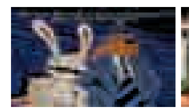
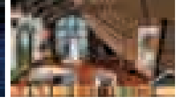
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

It may not be the longest of Link's epic adventures, but with a host of new abilities, items and plenty of the good old *Zelda* gameplay that we all know so well, this is certainly a worthy GBA title.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

There aren't many point-n-click adventures around nowadays, but when the PC was flooded by them years back *Sam & Max* emerged the best of the bunch. Even now, it's easy to see why.

THESE TITLES COULD BE APPEARING IN THESE LISTS IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Format: Xbox 360 Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-House

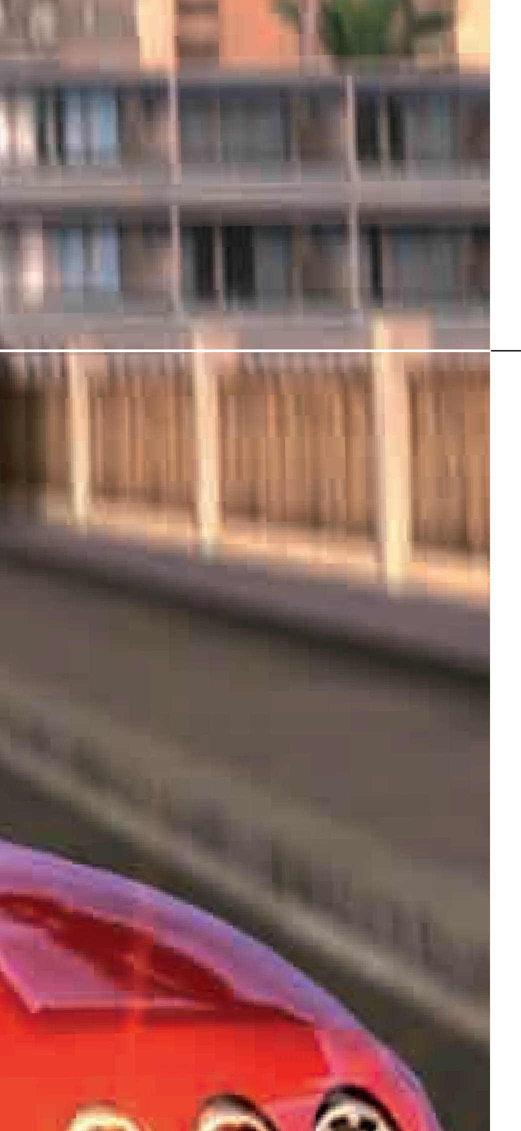
We've played an awful lot of *Dante's Awakening* and we've seen and done just about everything there is to offer. There's been talk of the next instalment for some time now but few actual facts have been revealed and only a short video has been seen of the game itself. It's now rumoured to be a PlatyStation3 launch title though, so we could be merely months away from another superb *Sons Of Sparda* adventure. TGS should reveal all hopefully.



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

games™ finally takes Test Drive for a spin. Get the definitive verdict next month





NEXT MONTH



If you shut your eyes it could be *Shenmue III*. Maybe, just maybe.

MORE… REVIEWS

Don't get us wrong, we love summer, but to be honest we've had quite enough of this videogames drought for one year. So, look forward to the **games™** verdict on Capcom's stunning *Dead Rising*, Sega's epic *Yakuza* and, finally, Eden's mammoth *Test Drive Unlimited*.

"DEAD RISING IS BIG, BRASH, CONFIDENT AND GROTESQUELY BEAUTIFUL"



It just doesn't look like an RTS does it? Absolutely stunning.

MORE… PREVIEWS

With everyone on the edge of their seats in anticipation of further next-generation gear to get their hands on, the big push for games is now in full effect, so look forward to hands on updates of *Gears Of War*, *Company Of Heroes*, *Crackdown* as well as a whole host of PlayStation3 and Nintenedo Wii goodness. Not long to wait now…

"THE RTS GENRE IS SET TO BE REDEFINED BY COMPANY OF HEROES"



Revered by many as the greatest RPG ever – will the Bible agree?

MORE… FEATURES

It's time to start preaching again – the **games™** bible is back in full swing, dissecting the immensely popular genre that is role-playing games. Expect the same level of intellect and insight that has defined the signature series so far. Oh, and the usual selection of exclusive interviews and cutting edge opinion features too. Don't miss out.

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Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

STRIDER AND SPACE *Harrier* made me love Sega. *Zelda* and *Mario* made me love Nintendo. Sony made me love Nintendo even more. So why haven't *Halo*, *Battlefront 2* and Live given me affection for Microsoft? The games are great, Xbox is great and Live has proven that Microsoft can be ahead of the pack.

The reason for my indifference? Microsoft is awful at promoting its products. The launch of 360 is an obvious example, but what about Live Arcade? I only found out by accident that it works on the original Xbox – you have to look really hard to find this out on xbox.com, but it is there. Why wasn't this made clear? It all got mashed up with the console's launch; I'm sure I wasn't the only one left confused. Once I found this out I looked into it and discovered that I needed a Live Arcade Launch Disc to use the service. Fine, but can I find one? A call to Microsoft confirmed that these discs exist, but they don't supply them and I should "try the Internet or a game shop". This I did with no luck either. It seems if I fork out for a full-price game or a new console I get the disc for free, but why should it be so restrictive? Microsoft could be making good money out of me if it was willing to make it just a little easier.
Dave Bright

games™: Good spot, Dave, and we have to admit this one had sailed right by us. Our jobs required us to immediately purchase a 360, so we didn't realise. We agree with the lacklustre marketing for Live Arcade. With the retro market growing rapidly it seems odd that Microsoft was happy not to adequately inform most of its customer base of Live Arcade's existence. We get the impression, though, that this difficulty may have something to do with drumming up sales for Xbox 360. After all, the more 'exclusive' content there appears to be, the more attractive it looks. We could be wrong, but then we don't pretend to be *The Economist*.

I WAS FLICKING through last issue's Essentials and I came across a small sentence in the Xbox 360 section: "Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag." It's the last part that caught my eye. Now, 360 is expensive but not compared to the likes of previous consoles – PSOne was released for £299.99. The main point I want to make is that, with the revelation of PlayStation3's price, 360 now seems like a bargain.

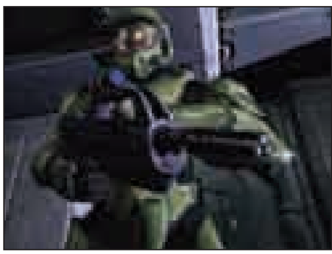
It will have the same level of graphics, possibly slightly less shine, and is £145 cheaper. PS3 seems to be a huge error for Sony; £425 is an astronomical price for a console. From the online forums I visit, most people are going for a 'Wii60' – a Wii and a 360 – which will almost certainly be available for the price of a single PS3, possibly at an extra £20-30.
Dominic Ellis

games™: Yes, the whole 'Wii60' idea is fast growing in popularity with us. We're sweating with the anticipation of PlayStation3 – it being our job to do so – but the high price tag has certainly cooled our jets. It seems to have the edge on graphical capability, but that will only go so far, and forthcoming titles for Xbox 360

"FROM THE ONLINE FORUMS I VISIT, MOST PEOPLE ARE GOING FOR A 'Wii60' – A Wii AND A 360 – WHICH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE AVAILABLE FOR THE PRICE OF A SINGLE PS3, POSSIBLY AT AN EXTRA £20-30 MORE"



Space Harrier gave everyone a very good reason indeed to love Sega…



…but Master Chief just cannot make Dave Bright fall for Microsoft.

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk**





PlayStation was actually far more expensive than most people remember it to be.



Is the military-produced *America's Army* the videogame finally going too far.

are looking gorgeous to say the least. Sony and its defenders are quick to bring up the machine's Blu-ray drive, but that technology is years too early to be a persuasive selling point. Current-gen machines sold well on the basis of the DVD drive, but that was at a point when VHS was all but dead. Blu-ray is unlikely to be the dominant format any time in the next few years, at which point £425 would make better sense, and 360 and Wii would give you more than enough reasons to feel cheerful in the meantime. Corroborating this are claims from developers that, due to the difficulty of harnessing PS3's potential, it will be a few years before the difference in power really becomes apparent. All told, things are looking shakier than ever for the super-sales that Sony is no doubt expecting.

I ADMIT TO being a little confused. You see, my Xbox 360 is telling me it's next gen, Sony and Nintendo are talking about next gen, and the media is screaming that you must own next gen – the trouble is, I'm still not sure what 'next gen' actually is?

Sony tells me that it's raw power – but is it not just prettier graphics? I confess to being suckered into thinking a pretty game must be a good game, but then the current gen isn't bad? Good graphics help you feel immersed, but so do great dialogue or a decent musical score.

Nintendo tells me that the next generation is about new ways of interacting with games, and I can see where it's going with this, however, I've lost count of the amount of light guns I've owned. It never made me feel like I was really blowing away bad guys, it just gave me an aching arm.

If next gen is simply a console update then well done, big tick, pour raw power into a shiny box and retire to a safe distance. However, this just makes the hardware better – not the games. I suppose next gen for me is fresh ideas, new concepts, different experiences, adult themes and involving stories. I want the next generation to be about feeling games as well as playing them.

Les Johnson

games™: Don't we all, Les, don't we all. The problem here lies with expectation, and gamers in particular are guilty of raising theirs to unachievable levels. The marketing machine is using 'next gen' as a catch-all for new consoles, and we must be careful not to place too much importance on the precise meaning of the term, especially when only one of the consoles is on the market. Quite simply, the new consoles are next generation because they are the ones that follow the last generation. The term does not imply any specific level of achievement, nor should it. PlayStation3 is more powerful, Xbox 360

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

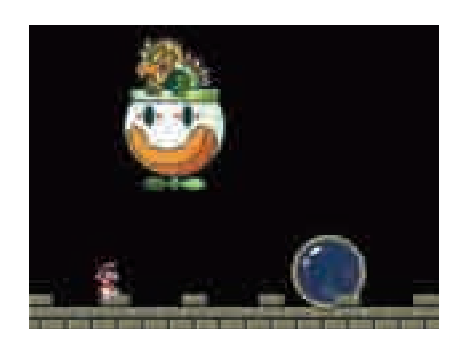
Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Because **games™** can't get enough of pointing out the odd mistake (it's like an addiction), we'd just like to say that the mention of PS3 and 360 as other formats in the arcade review of *Virtua Tennis 3* were a misprint. It was an arcade review only and no reflection of the as yet unseen next-gen conversions. So stop asking! We thank you.



Text Life

- Your *Winning Eleven* review score was wrong.
  g™: Says you, our friend, but improvements are improvements and it rules.
- *Sensible Soccer* is brilliant.
  g™: For approximately 20 minutes. We'd recommend a Mega Drive and *SWOS*.
- *LocoRoco* deserved a ten.
  g™: Those lovable jelly things deserve everything they desire… but not full marks.
- What's an Ultimate Margarita?
  g™: Tequila, Cointreau, lime juice, salt, ice. Mix. Drink. Regret.
- You can see the *Heavenly Sword* girl's pants.
  g™: Yes, both embarrassing and unnecessary we're sure you'll agree.
- What was with the Jelly Babies?
  g™: It's two months later, and even we still can't figure it out.
- Is your price going up?
  g™: For the last time, no. We thought you'd all get it. It backfired. Lesson learned.



According to Mr D, *Super Mario World* on the SNES marked the golden era of gaming.



The original *Sonic* had precious little plot, but that didn't affect the quality of the experience.

is possibly better value and Wii is the most innovative – though how well the motion-sensitive control system will work is far from guaranteed. They may all be 'next gen' but they are very different in their own ways, and if you wish to spend your money wisely, we advise that you put your efforts into deciding what is most important to you, not the definition of a marketing catchphrase.

I REMEMBER WHEN I first set eyes on the SNES and the feeling when I finally got it home, the experience of playing *Super Mario World* – the graphics, sound and downright addictive gameplay. I remember the first time I saw the PlayStation, and the possibilities that 3D presented. These two machines were the golden age for me.

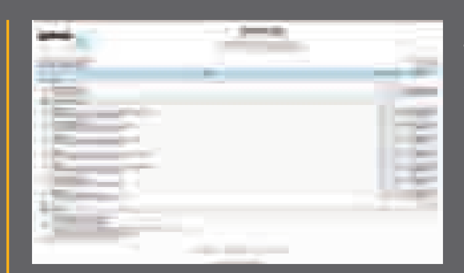
PlayStation2, while graphically better, has created feelings of apathy. I recently bought a PSP more for its technical aspects than its games. After obtaining it I began to feel cheated by the lack of quality software. I used to sell games, and I know that here in the UK we love the boring, bland, endless cycle of driving, shooting, sports and gangster sims. At the same time, I see that the PS3 advertising machine is cranking up with demos of the same old games. I was really ready to hang up my gaming gloves and pick up that rusty lawn mower in my garden. There just seemed nothing NEW out there.

Thank God, then, that Nintendo has tried something alternative to usual 'more memory, better graphics and rehashes of old games'. Nintendo DS seems to have many interesting and quality titles, and it looks as if this will continue for some time. The Nintendo Wii looks like a fun piece of kit, and let's face it, fun is what's missing from the industry at the moment. The innovative Wii sticks look set to open the door to 'entering' your gaming universe in the same way that 3D allowed players to move around in it.

I'm glad that Nintendo seems to be trying to expand the boundaries of how we interact with our games. However, my fear is that Wii will never catch on here in the UK. Gamers here prefer the short, sharp drug rush of – as I call it – 'fast-food' gaming than the quirky possibilities offered by Wii.

Mr D

games™: Your feelings of disappointment toward PSP seem well founded, but that's the peril of buying hardware based on power not preference. DS has been the more innovative and fun handheld for some time, and the world seems to be catching on. Wii is the next-gen wild card, and you're right, it doesn't cater to classic British tastes, but we'd stop short of calling anything 'fast-food' gaming. Individual taste is just that, and we're certain that next-gen masterpieces will emerge.



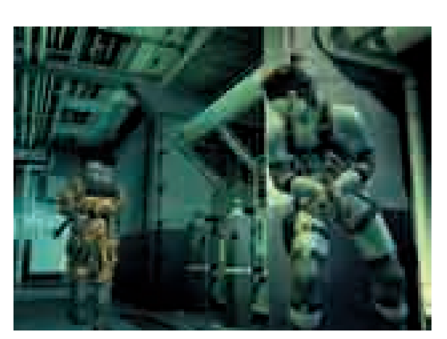
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FROM THE FORUM

WHEN IS A GAME CROSSING THE LINE?



Metroid Prime's subtle plot didn't interrupt the action, and complemented the game perfectly.



Metal Gear Solid's commitment to avoiding conflict and showing the consequences of violence makes it unique.

PLAYING THROUGH THE latest editions of some old franchises, I've noticed that there's been an increasing amount of 'plot' to the games. Whereas in the original *Sonic*, all you got in terms of story was 'Robotnik is turning animals into robots!', and in *Mario* all you had was 'Koopa has kidnapped Princess Toadstool!', these latest incarnations have included cut-scenes, and developers have gone out of their way to hire a ten year old to write scripts for them. That's not to say that a solid plot is a bad thing, but with these types of games I personally find them to be intrusive and horribly boring.

Would *Sonic Rush* have lost anything if there weren't frequent scenes where characters exchange insults with Robotnik? *Metroid Prime* avoided these pitfalls and featured only a minimal plot that suited the nature of the game. Would that have benefited from having a pretty-boy villain taunting our heroine at every turn?

The increase in technology has allowed for better storytelling in a lot of games, *The Legend Of Zelda* has been greatly enriched by the occasional cut-scene, the scan visor function in *Metroid Prime* allowed the game's story to progress while maintaining the isolated feel, and *Metal Gear Solid*, for all its failings, does have a very intriguing plot, yet it seems to me that some companies have lost sight of their priorities.

Joe Sullivan

games™: This is a commonly held opinion, Joe, and one that has caused much debate on forums recently. The frequency of plot and cut-scenes has unquestionably grown in recent years, and we are now seeing them spill over into genres that have survived perfectly well without them in the past. Unfortunately, we can't have it both ways – demanding plot in some games and not in others – because that would be a matter of taste. If you don't feel cut-scenes are necessary in a certain title, skip them, or at the very least stop paying attention. Some gamers enjoy a splash of drama, no matter how badly scripted.

"IF **NEXT GEN** IS SIMPLY **A CONSOLE UPDATE** THEN WELL DONE, BIG TICK, **POUR RAW POWER INTO A SHINY BOX AND RETIRE TO A SAFE DISTANCE**. I WANT NEXT GEN TO BE ABOUT **FEELING** GAMES **AS WELL AS PLAYING** THEM"

R_Nyaria
With all the talk of *GTA* being a game that 'crosses the line', people conveniently forget all those WWII and horror games. When will a game be crossing the line? In others words, when would it be wise to forbid a game from being released?

Naad
Well, I reckon that a game is crossing a line when there is violence but the morals aren't addressed. It would also be fair to consider the banning of a game if immoral actions were encouraged and rewarded. I know most people have common sense, but it still gives out a distorted image of a situation, and though games have age restrictions we all know that eight year olds still play.

toneeblair
It's illegal for stores to sell a rated game to anyone under the specified age. The store is fined and the employee faces jail if caught doing so. The shop can sell the game to the parent, and it's not in the shop's power to refuse that sale, but once the money's handed over it's the parent's responsibility to control the use of it. Parents need to be educated that a game's content is no less graphic than that of any other medium. Something that incites racist, sexist or extremist action is crossing the line. I read recently that an FPS had been modded by a militia group in the Middle East to act as an educational tool for suicide bombers… that's not right.

Peewacca
Remember *America's Army*, the free FPS game made by the US army? Just the same as the Middle East version I've noticed people talking about. I don't condone it, but both sides are at it.

Blackmage
To an adult, a game is crossing the line when it challenges their morals; to a child, when it's a game rated above their age; and to the public when the media wants a scapegoat.

Penhalion
Grand Theft Auto was designed to cross the line in order to gain publicity and greater sales, encouraging young children to shoot policemen and run over pedestrians while clearly implying that there are no consequences. Then take *Metal Gear Solid* – a game you can go through barely killing anyone at all – it makes a point of preaching the immorality of war every chance it gets. This shows that clearly you don't have to be a sociopath to have a good game. Jack Thompson, even with all of his inaccurate ranting, still hit a nerve with a lot of people. Somewhere deep down we all have a moral compass, and no matter how much we want it not to be so, we all know that *GTA* went too far by miles.




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